

**THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH
AND THE NEW JERUSALEM**

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PART 1. THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH (21:1-8)

a. The heaven and the earth (21:1a)

21:1 “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had *once for all time* passed away”¹ The seven seals of the scroll (5:1), which contain God’s eternal plan or counsel regarding Church history within world history, have all been broken and all history has been fulfilled. The time described within that scroll has gone by. The eternal state has arrived.

Revelation 21:1 to 22:5 is a description of the redeemed universe of the future as foreshadowed by the redeemed Church of the present. Every truth in Revelation 21:1 to 22:5 has a bearing for the Church in the present time! Thus, this is a symbolic description of the redeemed universe beyond present history together with its bearing upon present Church history!

The first heaven and the first earth had once for all time passed away (6:14; 20:11; cf. Isaiah 34:4; Matthew 24:29; Hebrews 1:10-12; 2 Peter 3:10-12). The present earth and sky had fled from the presence of Christ at his second coming (20:11). “The time for God to restore everything” (Acts 3:21-23) had arrived. The time, during which “the creation was subjected to frustration ... by its bondage to decay” (Romans 8:19-21; cf. Genesis 3:17-19; 5:29) had come to an end. “The kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Hebrews 12:28; cf. Daniel 2:44) had reached its final phase (cf. 11:15). John sees a new heaven and a new earth (cf. Isaiah 65:1,17; 66:22).

¹ Και ειδον (viaa) ουρανον καινον και γην καινην. ο γαρ πρωτος ουρανος και η πρωτη γη απηλθαν (viaa).
The aorist time expresses once for all time.

The second coming² (2 Peter 3:4) of Jesus Christ “as a thief” has come on “the day of the Lord”³ (2 Peter 3:10). That day will be “the day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7). That day will be “the day ... on which the present heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare” (2 Peter 3:10). “That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat” (2 Peter 3:12). On that day the promise of God concerning “the new heaven and new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13) will be finally fulfilled (2 Peter 3:7-13).

The new heaven and new earth will *not be another heaven and earth, but a renewed and transformed heaven and earth*. It will still be the same universe, but *renewed!* The verse 2 Peter 3:10 means: the present universe will pass away and make room for the new universe. The structure of the elements of this present earth will disintegrate in the fire. The present earth and all man’s achievements will be found out or exposed. Everything in this present creation will not be destroyed and recreated, but everything will be *restored* (Acts 3:21)!

The word new is used in contrast to something old, in the sense of the old that has become obsolete and should be *replaced* by what is new: a new covenant that replaces the old (Hebrews 8:8); a new heaven and new earth that replaces the old (21:1; 2 Peter 3:13).

It is still the old universe and the old earth, but it is new in the sense of renewed, rejuvenated, and transformed! The old universe in which the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, and the prostitute are carrying out their programme of iniquity will vanish completely!

b. The sea (21:1b)

“and the sea is no more.”⁴ In the Bible, the sea is often the symbol of the formless, empty, dark powers (cf. Genesis 1:2), of the monster of the deep (Job 7:12) and of powers that burst forth from the womb (Job 38:8-11). The sea is a symbol of enemies that hate without reason (Psalm 69:1-4), a symbol of unrest and conflict and a picture of the evil powers of chaos that threaten life. The sea is a figure of speech for the wicked nations: the Assyrians and their king (Isaiah 8:7-8), for nations that rage and peoples in uproar (Isaiah 17:12-13) and for the nations like Egypt and Assyria that cause trouble (Zechariah 10:11). The sea is a symbol for the godless nations that bring forth the four beasts or kings and their empires (Daniel 7:2,3,17), for the nations who worship antichrist, the beast, which arises from the sea (13:1). The sea is a picture of the peoples, multitudes, nations and languages on which Babylon, the great prostitute, sits, that is, the nations controlled by Satan’s antichristian seduction (17:15).

Thus, the sea is a symbol of the nations of the world in their conflict and unrest, *the nations as the breeding place of all the godless and wicked powers*. On the new earth there will *no longer be any such godless and wicked nations!*

c. The city (21:2,9-10)

21:2 “I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem”⁵ See the introduction of chapter 21 (background).

JERUSALEM IS THE FOCAL POINT OF BELIEVERS IN THE OLD AND THE NEW TESTAMENT.

The Heavenly Jerusalem (or the New Jerusalem) was the focal point of the believers during the Old Testament period. It was the focal point of God’s people like Abraham (2167 - 1992 B.C.) *even before the Jews existed as a nation* (1877 - 1447 B.C.) and *before the earthly city of Salem* (Jerusalem, cf. Genesis 14:18-20) belonged to Israel (cf. Hebrews 11:10,14-16)!

The Heavenly Jerusalem (or the New Jerusalem) continued to be the focal point of believers even *after Israel was carried away in exile* and *after the earthly Jerusalem was destroyed* (586 B.C.) (cf. Psalm 137:1,5,6;

² παρουσια

³ Hebrew: jom JaHWeH, Greek: ημερα κυριου

⁴ και η θαλασσα ουκ εστιν (vīpa) ετι

⁵ και την πολιν την αγιαν Ιερουσαλημ καινην ειδον (viaa)

Isaiah 2:2-4; 54:1-14; 60:1-5,10-22)! The description of Jerusalem in the Old Testament is clearly that of *the Heavenly Jerusalem or the New Jerusalem*: it is built with precious stones (cf. Isaiah 54:11-12) and it has all the characteristics of the New Jerusalem (Isaiah chapter 60). It is called 'The Lord is there' (Ezekiel 48:35; cf. Isaiah 12:6; Revelation 21:3). "The Lord will be a *refuge and stronghold* for his people" (Joel 3:14-21).

The Heavenly Jerusalem (or New Jerusalem) was the focal point of the Jewish and Gentile believers during the New Testament period (Galatians 4:24-27; Philippians 3:20; Colossians 3:1-4; 2 Timothy 4:18; Hebrews 12:22-24; 13:14).

The apostle Paul contrasts the Heavenly Jerusalem with the earthly city of Jerusalem in Palestine (50 A.D.). The earthly Jerusalem continues to produce children who are slaves to the law. They will never share in God's inheritance. The Heavenly Jerusalem bears children by the power of the Holy Spirit and they are free. They are children of the covenant promise that inherit all the promises of God (Galatians 4:21-31; cf. 2 Corinthians 1:20). The children of the Heavenly Jerusalem will be many more than the children of the earthly Jerusalem (Isaiah 54:1; Galatians 4:27)! That is very encouraging for Christians!

The Heavenly Jerusalem (or the New Jerusalem) continued to be the focal point of Jewish and Gentile believers even *after the earthly Jerusalem was destroyed* for a second time (70 A.D.) (cf. 11:1-2; 21:2; cf. Luke 21:20-24)!

The Heavenly Jerusalem (or the New Jerusalem) is contrasted with the earthly Palestinian Jerusalem (95-96 A.D.). The earthly Jerusalem crucified Christ and is figuratively called Sodom (because she is immoral) and Egypt (because she persecutes Christians) (11:8). The Heavenly Jerusalem exalts Christ and is called holy (because she is separated from sin and dedicated to God) (11:2) and new (because is completely renewed) (21:2).

The Heavenly Jerusalem (or the New Jerusalem) in conclusion is a biblical symbol of the community of God's people, the community of genuine believers, that is, the Church in both the Old and the New Testament! The Author of the New Testament uses these figurative descriptions of Zion and Jerusalem in the Old Testament to describe both the Heavenly Jerusalem before Christ's second coming and the New Jerusalem after Christ's second coming (cf. 21:12,14)! It is not the earthly Jerusalem, but the Heavenly (or the New) Jerusalem that is the focal point of believers in the Old and the New Testament!

The Heavenly Jerusalem will reach its completion and perfection in the New Jerusalem at Christ's second coming.

JERUSALEM IS A SYMBOL OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

There are several symbols for God's people in the Bible: the vineyard of the Lord (Isaiah 5:1-7), the city Jerusalem (Isaiah 52:9), the bride of God (Isaiah 62:5), the flock of the Shepherd Christ (John 10:16), the branches of the Vine (John 15:1-5), the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13), the household of God (Ephesians 2:19), the temple of God (Ephesians 2:21-22), the Bride of the Lamb (21:9), etc.

Before Christ's first coming, the believers in the Old Testament have been *looking forward to* "the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God". They were longing for "a better country – a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:10,16). The believers of the Old Testament period would only be made perfect together with the Christians of the New Testament period (Hebrews 11:39-40).

Before Christ's second coming, the believers in the New Testament have no enduring city on this earth, but *have already come* to that city, the Heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God (Hebrews 12:22). They are citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Philippians 3:20).

The Heavenly Jerusalem comprises of God the Judge of all men, of Christ the Mediator of the new covenant and the heavenly assembly of angels (Hebrews 12:22,24). The spirits of the departed believers, who have died during the Old and the New Testament period (cf. Hebrews chapter 11) are already in this Heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:23)! All Christians that still live on earth form the Church of the firstborn on earth, their names are already recorded or registered in heaven (Hebrews 12:23) and they too are looking forward to the Heavenly Jerusalem that will come down onto the new earth (Hebrews 13:14).

Before Christ's first coming, the Lord made his covenant with Sarah and her son Isaac and not with Hagar and her son Ishmael. The barren Sarah would become the mother of nations and kings (Genesis 17:16,19-

21). The prophet Isaiah saw the earthly Zion (Jerusalem) bereft of her children, because they had gone into Babylonian captivity. But the Lord prophesied through him that although she was now barren, she would become more fruitful than ever before (Isaiah 54:1-3).

At Christ's first coming, the covenant made with Abraham, Sarah and Isaac was finally realised in the people from all the nations that became believers through Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:6-7,16-17,26-29). The heavenly Zion, the Jerusalem above, will have an abundant posterity on earth.

Before Christ's second coming the present earthly city of Jerusalem is *figuratively* a picture of the old covenant people that are in slavery, while the Heavenly Jerusalem is *figuratively* a picture of the new covenant people that are free.

Paul did not contrast the *present* Jerusalem with the *future* Jerusalem, but rather *the present carnal Jerusalem* (the Jewish nation) with *the present spiritual Jerusalem* (the Church)!

Hagar, the literal Mount Sinai in Arabia and the earthly Jerusalem with her children all lie on the same line: they *represent carnal Israel (Jews) that has rejected Jesus Christ and his glorious gospel* (cf. Matthew 23:37). They also represent *the people who try to turn nominal Christians into Jews*. They enslave themselves to Sinai's Law, because they imagine that they can work their way into the kingdom of heaven by strict obedience to the Law and all its ceremonial regulations, expanded by 613 man-made additions. They turn the law into a ladder by which they imagine they can climb up to heaven and earn a place in heaven. But they are wrong, for the literal Mount Sinai is not in the Promised Land, but in the desert of Arabia (Galatians 4:24-25).

In contrast, Sarah, the figurative Mount Zion (14:2; Hebrews 12:22,) and the Heavenly Jerusalem with her children all lie on the same line: they *represent spiritual Israel (Jews and Gentiles) that has accepted Jesus Christ* (Galatians 4:26). They are really free (John 8:31-36).

When Paul spoke of the Jerusalem above, he was not only thinking of the Triumphant Church in heaven, but also of the many spiritual blessings, which descend from heaven onto the Militant Church on earth (cf. Ephesians 1:3), thus creating the Church below on the earth, strongly influencing the Church on earth, producing conditions in the Church on earth, which in some measure reflect the conditions of the Church in heaven. He called this present Heavenly Jerusalem "the mother of us all". She has spiritual children that are already in heaven, the spirits of departed believers, whether originally from the Old Testament period or from the New Testament period. And she has spiritual children that are still alive on earth, like Paul, the believers in the congregations of Judea and the believers in the congregations of Galatia. He calls them "the Church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven" (Hebrews 12:23). Only in a figurative sense do Christians have God as their 'Father' and the Church as their 'mother'. But if the Heavenly Jerusalem may be called "the mother of us all" (Galatians 4:26), then the Church may be called "the Israel of God". It consists of Jews and Gentiles that believe in Jesus Christ and that belong to "the new creation" in Christ (Galatians 6:14-16).

d. The city continually coming down (21:2b)

"continually coming down out of heaven from God"⁶ Three times it is said that the New Jerusalem is coming down now in the present time (3:12; 21:2,9-10). Whenever as a result of Christ's first coming and completed work of salvation, people on earth are being born from above (John 3:3-8), then "the New Jerusalem is coming down"! Or as the apostle Paul expresses this truth: "The Jerusalem that is above ...is our mother" (Galatians 4:26).

Whenever heaven's peace, justice and righteousness are reflected in the hearts and lives of God's children on earth (cf. Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 31:31-34), then the New Jerusalem is coming down! Whenever people do God's will on earth as it is done in heaven (Matthew 6:10), then the New Jerusalem is coming down. In summary, whenever true believers on earth overcome⁷, then the New Jerusalem is coming down in the sense that it is *creating and strongly influencing the present Church on earth*. But all this is only an anticipatory fulfilment of the prophecies, because the perfection belongs to the day of the great consummation. That is why in Revelation 21:1 to 22:5 the New Jerusalem is depicted in one sense as *already becoming now* what it will one day be in complete perfection! In these two final chapters of the Bible there are statements to the

⁶ καταβαινουσαν (vppa) εκ του ουρανου απο του θεου. The present tense expresses continuous action.

⁷ νικων > νικαω (to conquer, to overcome, to be the victor)(vppa). Cf. 2:7,11,17,26 and 1 John 5:4 (the born-again, the believers).

effect that *things, which in the final consummation will be complete perfection, are in principle already happening now!* Revelation chapters 21 and 22 contain promises, exhortations and warnings for the Militant Church now: for those who are thirsty now (21:6), for those who overcome now (21:7), for those who are cowardly and unbelieving now (21:8) and for those who keep the words of the prophecy in this book now (22:7). The things revealed, not only in the whole book of Revelation, but also in these two final chapters “must soon take place” (22:6). The time for them to be fulfilled is “near” (22:10)!

Examples in the New Testament of the New Jerusalem coming down now in the present time.

Christ is already now preparing his bride (21:2; cf. 2 Corinthians 11:2-3; Ephesians 5:25-27). Christ is already now making things new (21:5; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17). Christ is already now giving the water of life to the thirsty (21:6; cf. John 4:10,14; 7:37-39). Christ is already now gathering his covenant people (21:7; cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16). Christ is already now protecting his people with a wall (21:12; cf. Psalm 34:7; 139:5). Christ is already now drawing his people from every direction on earth through the twelve open gates into his kingdom (21:12,13,25; cf. John 12:32). Christ is already now building them on the twelve foundations of the apostles (21:14; cf. Ephesians 2:19-22). Christ is already now dwelling spiritually in them as in the cubic form of the Most Holy Place (21:16; 1 Kings 6:20; cf. John 15:5,7). Christ is already now continually accessible for his people via the streets (21:21; cf. Ephesians 2:18; 3:12). Christ is already now revealing God’s characteristics to his people through his light (21:23; cf. Isaiah 49:6; John 1:18; 14:9; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Acts 13:47). Christ is already now keeping the gates open so that people may enter his kingdom (21:25; John 10:9; 6:37). Christ is already now causing the nations to bring their splendour, glory and honour into his kingdom (21:24,26; cf. Isaiah 60:1-5; Matthew 28:19; Revelation 5:9). Already now the city above has nothing impure that enters it (21:8,27; cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; John 3:18,36). Christ already now gives them eternal life through *the water of the river of life* (22:1; cf. John 7:37-39). Already now the river of the water of life that flows and becomes wider and deeper all the time represents the triumphant progression of the gospel throughout the world, in which God’s grace offers eternal life to people (22:1; cf. Matthew 13:31-33; 24:14; Acts 5:28; 17:6; 20:24-25). Already now the tree of life represents the availability of eternal life and the abundance of the new life (22:2; 2:7; cf. Genesis 2:9; 3:22,24; John 3:16; 10:10,28; Romans 8:32; Ephesians 1:3). Already now the leaves of the tree of life represent the availability of healing for the nations (22:2; cf. Ezekiel 47:1-12; Matthew 8:14-17; 11:5).

Revelation chapter 21 and 22 is a message of encouragement and warning for the Church now. In the description of the New Jerusalem, the present time and eternity are not sharply differentiated. The Heavenly Jerusalem that affects its people now on earth and the New Jerusalem that is finally completely perfected on the new earth is one. God’s people now already in heaven and presently still on earth and finally completely perfected on the new earth in eternity are one. Nevertheless, the condition of her glory on this present earth differs very much from that in the present heaven and on the future new earth! In one sense, the New Jerusalem is already now coming down to this present earth, but only at Christ’s second coming will it come down onto the new earth in complete perfection!⁸

Even in Revelation chapter 21 and 22 *the present time* is not lost out of sight. It is a message of encouragement and warning to the Church in every period of the New Testament age as the Church is established, sanctified, protected and multiplied! The present Church on earth must proclaim and warn, and spread Christ’s invitation, promises and threats (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16; Romans 15:4).

The Heavenly Jerusalem is “the mother of all believers” now. From heaven she gave spiritual new birth to her children on earth (Galatians 4:21-31). Although many of her spiritual children are still on earth, already now their names are registered in the book of life in heaven (Luke 10:20; Hebrews 12:23). Already now their lives are governed from heaven in accordance with heavenly standards (Romans 8:5-11; Galatians 5:16-26). Already now their interests are promoted from heaven (Romans 8:28). Already now their true citizenship and homeland is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). Already now their life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3) and already now their eternal inheritance rights are secure in heaven (John 14:1-4; Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 1:20-22; 1 Peter 1:4-5).

Although Christians are outwardly (physically) wasting away, inwardly (spiritually) they are being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16-17). Christians live not by sight, but by faith (2 Corinthians 4:18; 5:7). Christians set their minds and hearts not on the earthly things, but on the things above, where Christ is seated

⁸ Greijdanus p 310

at the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1-4). Christians pray with confidence to God in heaven (Hebrews 4:14-16). And Christians have hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure in heaven (Hebrews 6:19-20).

In summary. In one sense, true Christians on earth *have already now come to the Heavenly Jerusalem* (Hebrews 12:22-24), and in another sense, *the New Jerusalem is already now coming down out of heaven* (3:12)! But all this is only an anticipatory fulfilment of the prophecies, because the perfection belongs to the day of the great consummation (Christ's second coming).

e. The bride (21:2c)

“prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband.”⁹

God's people are depicted as a bride. The New Jerusalem will be adorned as a bride. The New Jerusalem is not a literal city, but an apocalyptic picture (symbol) of the bride of Christ (21:2,9-10). In the Old Testament true believers are not only called the bride of God (Isaiah 62:5), but are also depicted as a strong city with salvation as its walls, into which the righteous and faithful enter (Isaiah 26:1-2). And in the New Testament, true believers are not only called the bride of the Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2), but are also depicted as the heavenly city (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22). Therefore, *the New Jerusalem is the sum total of God's people in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, the sum total of all believers that ever lived on earth, the community of God's people* (cf. Romans 11:25-26).

God's people are prepared for the wedding of the Lamb. Throughout history, the people of God *are being prepared* for this final day, for the wedding of the Lamb (19:7). Throughout history Christ has given himself to them; to the Church in the Old Testament (1 Peter 1:10-12; Hebrews 11:39-40) and to the Church in the New Testament. He has given himself to make her holy and blameless by cleansing her through the Word, and to present her to himself as a radiant Church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish (Ephesians 5:25-27). Throughout history Christ is gathering his people into his Church (cf. the promises, exhortations and warnings in Revelation 21:5-8 and cf. Matthew 3:11-12; 8:11-12; 22:1-14).

At Christ's second coming *the wedding of the Lamb* will take place and *the bride of the Lamb will figuratively become the wife of the Lamb* (21:9). What has been happening throughout history, reaches its final consummation at Christ's second coming. The marriage-feast of the Lamb will last forever!

Christ's second coming (Matthew 24:30-31; 2 Peter 3:4) is called the day of the Lord (2 Peter 3:10) on which God will restore everything (Acts 3:21). The following events will take place at the second coming: Christ will come in great splendour with his angels (Matthew 24:30-31). He will come together with the souls or spirits of Christians who had died before (1 Thessalonians 4:14). The dead bodies of all believers and unbelievers will be physically resurrected (John 5:28-29). The still living Christians will be changed in the twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:50-53). First all the Christians will be caught up into the sky to welcome Christ and to marvel at him (Matthew 24:40a,41a; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:10). Then on the same last day the non-Christians will be driven before his judgement throne (Matthew 24:40b, 41b). The final judgement will take place where the unbelievers will be separated from the believers for eternity (Matthew 3:12; 13:30,36-43; 25:31-46; 2 Peter 3:7). Then Christ will renew this present heaven (universe) and earth (2 Peter 3:10-13). The New Jerusalem, which will now be the sum-total of all God's people throughout history, will come down out of heaven or the sky (the place where God in Christ is) onto the new earth. It will be perfectly complete. God will dwell with his people on the new earth (21:3). Then the Church throughout all the centuries will have become the final phase of the visible kingdom of God on the new earth (the eternal kingdom of God)(Matthew 25:34; 1 Corinthians 15:28; Revelation 11:15).

The New Jerusalem is described in glorious terms, because nothing in the entire universe is as glorious as visible fellowship with God. While Babylon was unholy and old, Jerusalem is holy and new!

⁹ ητοιμασμενην (vnp) ως νυμφην κεκοσμημενην > κοσμεω (to adorn, to decorate)(vnp) τω ανδρι αυτης

f. The covenant (21:3)

21:3 “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them.’”¹⁰ The voice is probably of a mighty angel before the throne (cf. 19:5). His voice had to be heard everywhere. “Look!” is a worshipful and joyful shout, because what the believers have always seen by faith, they now see with their eyes (cf. 1:7).

Literally it says, “The tent of God (is) with people, and he will put up his tent with them” (cf. Isaiah 4:2-6; 8:14; Ezekiel 37:28). So close will be the eternal fellowship between God and his people that he, as it were, dwells with them in one tent – *his* tent (7:15)! God dwelling with his people is the essence of redemption. Personally knowing God, living in his visible presence, fellowshiping with him and serving him is the essence of eternal life (John 17:3; cf. Psalm 27:4)! All the other blessings of salvation flow out of this condition. On the new earth *the relationship with God* will be the most important thing that happens.

Before the new heaven and the new earth, God’s dwelling was in heaven, while we people were on earth. Without Christ, God would have remained invisible and unapproachable. After Christ’s first coming God is visible and approachable by faith. After Christ’s second coming God will be completely visible and approachable physically, namely, in Jesus Christ. On the present earth God already dwells in his Church invisibly through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22). On the new earth God will dwell in his Church visibly through Jesus Christ (21:22-23)! Through Jesus Christ God will dwell visibly right in the midst of his people and the relationship with God will be very personal and intimate.

“They will be his peoples (plural), and God himself will be with them and be their God.”¹¹ The essence of God’s covenant during the Old Testament was, “I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people” (Leviticus 26:12). This covenant promise of grace was first given to Abraham as an everlasting covenant (Genesis 17:7). It was reconfirmed with Moses (Exodus 6:2-7) and with the priestly house of Levi and the royal house of David as a covenant that will not fail and that cannot be broken (Jeremiah 33:14-26). After the exile it was again reconfirmed with the remnant as the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and finally reconfirmed at Christ’s first coming to God’s New Testament people (Acts 13:32-37,46-48; Galatians 3:6-29; Ephesians 3:2-6; Hebrews 8:6-13). The living God, who revealed himself through Jesus Christ, will be their God and they will be his people (2 Corinthians 6:16).

At Christ’s second coming God’s covenant is finally completely and perfectly fulfilled. The plural ‘peoples’ is used to indicate these peoples as nations from different people groups (cf. 5:9-10; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 17:15) and probably also as a very great crowd, an uncountable great number of them! The whole Bible history is a history of God’s covenant with his people (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 21:3,7). The whole Bible must be explained in the light of God’s one covenant with his people during both the Old Testament and the New Testament periods.¹²

g. The renewal (21:4-5a)

21:4 “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the first things have passed away.”¹³ ‘The first things’ mean the old order of things. The eternal relationship with God and the blessedness of those that may dwell in the new heaven on the new earth is described. God will remove every scar and memory of sin and suffering on the present earth. He will wipe away every tear from eyes (7:17; 21:4; cf. Isaiah 25:8). There will be no more death (21:4; 20:14; cf. Isaiah 25:8; 1 Corinthians 15:26,42-44,50-54; 2 Timothy 1:10), or mourning, or crying (21:4; cf. Isaiah 35:10; 51:11; 65:19), or pain (21:4). The old order of things has passed away (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17). He will heal the scars of our sins and misery. He will give us continued experience of the fullness of life. He will let us walk in the light of knowledge, joy and holiness. And we will see his face.

¹⁰ και ηκουσα (viaa) φωνης μεγαλης εκ του θρονου λεγουσης (vrra), Ιδου η σκηνη του θεου μετα των ανθρωπων, και σκηνωσει > σκηνοω (to dwell, to live)(vifa) μετ αυτων

¹¹ και αυτοι λαοι αυτου εσονται (vifm), και αυτος ο θεος μετ αυτων εσται (vifm), [αυτων θεος,]

¹² The whole Bible should NOT be explained in terms of so-called dispensations.

¹³ και εξαλειψει > εξαλειφω (vifa) παν δακρυον εκ των οφθαλμων αυτων, και ο θανατος ουκ εσται (vifm) ετι, ουτε πενθος ουτε κραυγη ουτε πονος ουκ εσται (vifm) ετι. [οτι] τα πρωτα απηλθαν > απερχομαι (to go away, to depart)(viaa)

Contrast the blessedness of the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ, with the curse on the old Babylon, the great prostitute. Notice the death and mourning, famine and conflagration, the absence of joy, music, meaningful work, light and festivals in her (18:8,21-23)!

21:5 “He who was seated on the throne said”¹⁴ In the Bible God reveals himself as *one* divine nature, but with *inner distinctions* as the Father (the Originator of all things), the Son (the Mediator of all things) and the Holy Spirit (the One who represents Christ on earth and who applies Christ’s completed salvation work to believers on earth) (cf. Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 8:6; John 14:16-17; 16:13-15). Jesus Christ is also the Mediator of God’s judgement (John 5:22,27).

The One seated on the throne is *God as he reveals himself in Christ*, the Mediator. In the revelation of heaven God sits on the throne (4:9-11). At his enthronement (after his death, resurrection and ascension) the Lamb stood in the centre of the throne, receiving the scroll sealed with seven seals (5:6-7) and then sat down with God the Father on his throne (3:21). Throughout the period from Christ’s first coming to Christ’s second coming Christ sits at the right hand of God (cf. Psalm 110:1; Matthew 26:64; 1 Peter 3:22). At Christ’s second coming, the One sitting on the great white throne of judgement (20:11) will be Jesus Christ, because God the Father has entrusted all judgement to God the Son (John 5:22,27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Matthew 25:31-33; 1 Corinthians 15:25; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:1). On the new earth, the throne of God the Father and God the Son (the Lamb) will be one (22:3) and the kingship of God the Father and God the Son will be eternal (2 Peter 1:11).

“I am continually making everything new!”¹⁵ Because the emphasis is on the word ‘all things’ (everything) the word is put last: “I am now making new *all things!*” Renewal is accomplished by Jesus Christ, because the One speaking here is God in Christ. Renewal includes everything: the universe and the earth and everything on it; the people, their relationships and conditions; and the way of existence, of enjoying and of working (cf. Isaiah 43:18-21). Renewal is going on NOW. Note, he does not say, “I *will make* everything new” as if this all is still future. He also does not say, “I *have made* everything new” as if the renewal had already been completed. He says, “I *am making* everything new!” God in Christ is NOW and throughout history busy to make everything new (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17), even though at his second coming this renewal will be completely perfected (cf. Ephesians 1:10). Christ is now in the process of making all things new! This continuous renewal is part of that aspect of the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven at the present time (cf. 21:2)!

This renewal cannot and will not be accomplished by what people and their governments on earth do. Better social services, better education, better legislation, better distribution of wealth, better environmental development, etc. without Jesus Christ are not going to usher in the new era or golden age! The Christian message is not the same as the communist, socialist or humanist messages! Only God in Christ through the Spirit makes all things new! Renewal is holistic. Christians are not just saving souls. They are also saving bodies, marriages, families, neighbourhoods and even nations. Christians fight against lies, immorality and corruption. Through Jesus Christ Christians are making the social services, education, legislation, distribution of wealth, environmental development, etc. of their country new and better! However, the final and complete renewal of all things will happen only through Jesus Christ at his second coming (cf. Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:1-3).

h. The oral tradition and the written Bible (21:5b)

“Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’”¹⁶ It is not stated who is speaking. It could be God or Christ or an angel (1:1,3; 14:13; 19:9).

The oral tradition and the written Bible. He does not say, “Write down *that* these words are trustworthy and true”. He says, “Write these words down, *because* these words are trustworthy and true”. *The oral tradition* could go lost when people die and generations pass on. Therefore the words of Christ must be written down. *The written Bible* is very important (John 14:26; 16:13)! God or Christ himself did not want us to rely on the

¹⁴ Και ειπεν > (2nd aorist of) λεγω (viaa) ο καθημενος (vppn) επι τω θρονω

¹⁵ Ιδου καινα ποιω (vira) παντα

¹⁶ και λεγει (vira), Γραψον (vmaa), οτι ουτοι οι λογοι πιστοι και αληθινοι εισιν (vira)

oral tradition, but on the written word (Isaiah 8:1,19-20; Mark 7:1-13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 3:1-2,16)! What had been revealed to John, had to be written down (19:9; 22:6). All following generations of people had to know and believe these things. That is why they had to be recorded in writing (John 20:30-31; 1 John 5:13; Luke 1:1-4). That is also why Christians must base all their doctrines and ethics on the correct explanation of the Bible and not on human or Church traditions. And that is why Christians are commanded not to go beyond what is written (in the Bible) (1 Corinthians 4:6).¹⁷

i. The Initiator and Finisher (21:6a)

21:6 “He said to me, ‘It is done (*and the results continue on*)’”¹⁸ There are two perspectives:

From our perspective standing at the end of world history all the events had taken place and their results continue on. Whatever God had decided to happen in his eternal plan for the entire world has happened.

In Revelation chapter 21 the history of the world and of his Church in the world has come to an end (cf. 16:17¹⁹). These words are the absolute fulfilment of God’s words in Isaiah, “Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand.” “For the Lord Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?” (Isaiah 14:24,27). What God had planned, has happened and continues forever to be the only reality.

From God’s perspective standing at the beginning of the New Testament all events will certainly take place. God is the Eternal One and for him there is no past, present and future. Whatever God has decided or planned is even then and now as certain as if it had already happened! Therefore, whatever still lies in the future for created man is an absolute accomplished fact, a concluded case, and a present reality for God!

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End”²⁰

In Revelation 1:4 God the Father is introduced as the One “who is, and who was, and who is to come”. This is the essential meaning of the personal name JaHWeH (LORD)(Exodus 3:13-15). He is the eternal Unchangeable and Faithful One in his nature, plans, words and deeds. Especially with regard to his promises and his threats he will remain unchangeable. As he showed himself to be in the past, so he shows himself to be in the present and so he will show himself to be in the future.

In Revelation 1:8 God the Son, Jesus Christ, makes the same claim. The One speaking in Revelation 1:8 is Jesus Christ, because the immediate previous and following context speaks of Christ (1:7,13). In verse 7, John saw the Lord coming and in verse 8 he hears him speaking. Revelation 1:13 says that the voice that was speaking belonged to one like a son of man. Verse 8 is therefore a *self-description of Jesus Christ*. Jesus Christ makes this same claim again in Revelation 1:17, 21:6 and 22:12-13. By comparing verse 4 and verse 8, we can see that Jesus Christ claims that he (God the Son) and God the Father are One divine nature (John 10:30), that he is fully equal to the Father, and that he is the complete, perfect and eternal visible revelation of God to people (Colossians 1:15,19; 2:9; Hebrews 1:3). Christ is the origin of everything in the universe and the goal of everything in the universe (Colossians 1:16-17; cf. Romans 11:36). He is from the very beginning to the very end, that is, he is the Eternal One. He is One who embraces all, bears all and determines all, material and spiritual, by means of his knowledge and ability. God reveals himself in all his greatness and majesty in Christ (John 5:22-23,26).

In Revelation 21:6 Christ repeats his claim. He is God forever. And he is the same forever. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). But at the end of history, this will be seen much more clearly. “From God, through God and to God are all things. To him be the glory for ever and ever” (Romans 11:36; cf. Colossians 1:16-17). Whatever has been revealed to happen in history, whatever has been said between Revelation 1:1 and 21:6 is trustworthy and true. And God in Jesus Christ stands guarantee for it. With him these things are as if they have already happened completely!

¹⁷ ἵνα ἐν ἡμῖν μαθητε > μανθανω (vsaa) το Μη υπερα γεγραπται > γραφω (virp)

¹⁸ και ειπεν (viaa) μοι, Γεγοναν > γινομαι (vira).

The perfect tense expresses that they have come to pass and their results continue on in the future.

¹⁹ Γεγονεν > γινομαι (vira)

²⁰ εγω [ειμι (vira)] το Αλφα και το Ω, η αρχη και το τελος.

j. The water of life (21:6b)

“To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.”²¹
The water of life is a symbol of eternal life, salvation full and free (Psalm 36:8-9).

The water of life before Christ’s second coming. Christ who is now in the process of making all things new, is also now in the process of giving eternal life (salvation full and free) to everyone who wants it (cf. Isaiah 55:1; John 4:10,14; 10:10; 7:37-39). *This is part of that aspect of the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven at the present time* (cf. 21:2)! In the present time, it is given to everyone who thirsts.

The water of life after Christ’s second coming. At the renewal of all things, the Lamb will lead his people to springs of living water (7:16-17). The water of life will be poured fresh and full into every living being. After the renewal of all things, they will never thirst again! All their needs and holy desires will forever be fulfilled in an overflowing manner, giving abundant life and joy.

k. The believers overcome (21:7)

21:7 “He who again and again overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.”²² To overcome the evil world is *to continue to believe* that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5). To overcome is to get up *again or to remain* standing in the midst of trials and temptations in this world (John 16:33). To overcome the evil one is closely connected to allowing God’s Word to live in you (1 John 2:14). In summary: To overcome means to crucify the sinful nature in you (Romans 8:12-13), to conquer the evil world around you (1 John 2:15-17) and to conquer the evil Satan and all his evil allies (Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Peter 5:8-9; James 4:7-8).

Those who overcome are vigorous believers that eagerly take possession of the kingdom of God (Matthew 11:12). They are the branches that remain in Jesus Christ under all circumstances (John 15:5). They do not allow the devil or the world to pull them away from fellowship and service of God, but they fight to the end against backsliding and unrighteousness. Note Christ’s promises in his seven letters to those who overcome (2:7, etc). People who fail to overcome are unbelievers or people who prefer the power, fame and pleasures of this earth above the salvation of the new earth.

Sincere believers will get up again and will remain standing. They will overcome because Christ has overcome and the results of his victory continue for ever (John 16:33). Christ and all those who belong to him are in the process of overcoming the antichristian political rulers (the beast) and their powerful allies (the ten horns) (17:14)! That is why the apostle can confidently say, “We are more than conquerors through Christ. Nothing can separate us from God’s love for us” (Romans 8:37-39).

l. The unbelievers are lost (21:8)

21:8 “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practise magic arts, the idolaters and all liars”²³ Several lists of sins are found in the Bible (Deuteronomy 18:10-14; Matthew 15:19; Romans 1:29-32; 1 Corinthians 5:10-11; 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21 and in Revelation 21:8).

Thus, the people that are excluded from the New Jerusalem are also clearly described in the Bible. *Christ’s intention is to warn everyone not to go along with the evil world! It is a call to repentance in the present time!* Whoever does not belong to the Heavenly Jerusalem now when he lives on this present earth, will also not belong to the New Jerusalem in the future on the new earth!

People are *cowardly*, fearful and lack holy courage, when they are ashamed of Christ and his words (Matthew 10:33; Mark 8:38). People are cowardly when they forsake the cause and service of Christ in order

²¹ εγω τω διψωντι > διψαω (to be thirsty)(νppa) δωσω (vifa) εκ της πηγης του υδατος της ζωης δωρεαν

²² ο νικων (νppa) κληρονομησει (vifa) ταυτα, και εσομαι (νifm) αυτω θεος και αυτος εσται (νifm) μοι υιος
The present tense stresses “again and again” or “continuously”.

²³ τοις δε δειλοις και απιστοις και εβδελυγμενοις > βδελυσσομαι (to abhor, to detest)(νprfm) και φονευσιν και πορνοις και φαρμακοις και ειδωλατραις και πασιν τοις ψευδεσιν το μερος αυτων εν τη λιμνη τη καιομενη (νppp) πυρι και θειω, ο εστιν (vifa) ο θανατος ο δευτερος. εβδελυγμενος = βδελυκτος (the abominable)

to go along with the enjoyments of this present world. People are cowardly when they leave the Church because they fear the defamation and persecution of the world.

People are *unbelieving* when they reject Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord (John 5:40). They are unfaithful when they deny or give up the Christian faith (cf. 1 Timothy 1:19-20).

People are *vile* (abominable, detestable) when they occupy themselves with sexual immorality (17:4-5; Leviticus 19:26-31; Deuteronomy 18:10-14; Matthew 15:18-19; 1 Corinthians 5:9-11; 6:9-10; 1 Peter 4:3-4).

People are *murderers* when they physically kill others or spiritually kill them by their anger (Matthew 5:22).

People are *sexually immoral* when they have sexual desires for someone who is not their marriage partner (Matthew 5:28) or when they commit sexual acts before or outside their marriage relationship (Hebrews 13:4).

People *practice magic arts* when they dabble in sorcery, magic, occultism or Satanism (cf. 9:21; 18:23; Exodus 7:11; Leviticus 19:26,31; Isaiah 47:12).

People are *idolaters* when they worship images of gods made by people, or worship the god of a religion devised by a man or a so-called prophet, or rely on and live for modern idols like power, pleasure or money (materialism, Mammon) (Matthew 6:24).

People are *liars* when they do not speak the truth, or when they live a lie, are insincere or pretend to be someone they are not.

“– their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.”

This is hell after the final judgement day (19:20; 20:10,14). These people are thrown body and soul into everlasting damnation and separation from God (Matthew 10:28; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

This verse does not imply that people who do these godless evil things at the present time would for ever continue to do these godless and evil things. It is rather a warning of Christ to people NOW and a call to repentance in the present time! Everyone who repents from these things will be washed, justified and sanctified (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)!

m. Different views about the new heaven and new earth (21:1)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The new heaven would be limited to only a new atmosphere for the new earth. It would not be a new universe. The new earth would be the fourth earth since creation.²⁴

Second view. (The correct explanation) The new heaven and new earth will *not be another heaven and earth, but a renewed and transformed heaven and earth.* It will still be the same universe, but *renewed!*

Everything in this present creation will not be destroyed and recreated, but everything will be *restored* (Acts 3:21)! The old universe in which the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, and the prostitute are carrying out their programme of iniquity will vanish completely!

PART 2. THE NEW JERUSALEM (THE BRIDE OR THE WIFE OF THE LAMB) (21:9-21)

Revelation 21:9-21 describes the New Jerusalem, its location, form, dimensions and brilliant glory, its gates, foundations, walls, its beauty, light, its inhabitants, its splendour, glory and honour, purity, its enjoyments and activities.

a. The city (21:9-10,18b; see also 21:2)

21:9 “One of the seven angels who had the bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, ‘Come I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’”²⁵ One of the seven angels who had the bowls full of the seven last plagues (15:1) had shown John *the great prostitute*²⁶, that is, Satan’s antichristian community with

²⁴ Larkin, Revelation pp. 199-203

²⁵ Και ηλθεν (viaa) εις εκ των επτα αγγελων των εχοντων τας επτα φιαλας, των γεμοντων > γεμω (vnpa) των επτα πληγων των εσχατων, και ελαλησεν (viaa) μετ εμου λεγων (vnpa), Δευρο (vmaa), δειξω (vifa) σοι την νυμφην την γυναικα του αρνιου

²⁶ The prostitute has several historical manifestations.

- The prostitute represents Satan’s antichristian culture embodied in the great Babylon, the city with its immoral people and culture during the Old Testament period (17:5).
- Then the prostitute represents Satan’s antichristian culture manifested in Rome, the city with seven hills and its immoral people and culture (17:9,18).

its evil world culture (17:1). Now one of these angels shows John *the bride or wife of the Lamb*, that is, the Christian community with its righteous kingdom culture (the Church)! But in the next verse we see that he shows John the city, the New Jerusalem, which is of course another symbol of the Church.

Babylon the great is always the opposite of the heavenly or New Jerusalem (Hebrews 10:22-24; Revelation 21:9-10). Satan's antichristian world, people and culture is always the opposite of Christ's new world, people and culture. Both symbols are introduced by one of the angels who had the seven bowls (17:1 and 21:9).

21:10 “And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.”²⁷

The New Jerusalem is a symbolic picture of a literal reality. The New Jerusalem is *not a literal city*, but a *symbol of something literal*. The city is a symbol of the sum-total of God's Old Testament and New Testament people. They will finally descend onto the new earth and live on the new earth as the New Jerusalem.

Jesus Christ is not referred to by name, but is called the Lamb seven times in this section (21:9,14,22,23,27; 22:1,3). When the Lamb was enthroned at the end of his first coming he received the scroll with the seven seals that contained God's eternal counsel or plan (5:1-10). Throughout the New Testament period he opened these seals, which symbolises that he effected (brought about) what the seals revealed (6:1 to 11:19). When the Lamb had accomplished God's eternal purposes at his second coming, he set his seal on God's completed work of salvation by presenting his bride, the Church (19:6-10).

With his thoughts, imagination and feelings John was again on the earth. The angel carried him away in the Spirit (cf. 1:10; 4:2). This journey is not physically or locally, but spiritual according to John's perception and awareness. John is carried to a mountain great and high, from where he was given to see in a vision the New Jerusalem *coming down out of heaven from God* (21:2). It is only when Christians stand on the high mountain of faith that they are able to see things as God sees them (cf. Psalm 73:16-17). Only in the light of God's revelation can Christians see the Church both in its present ideal and temporary state and in its future perfect and eternal state.

The New Jerusalem is called the Holy City in order to stress its *separation* from the godless and wicked present world and its *dedication* to everything that is godly and righteous within this world.

The various parts of the New Jerusalem is described in symbols that refer to literal realities. People, who regard and treat the book of Revelation as a historical book, take the description of the city and its measurements *literally*. Then the city would be a literal city, about 2200 kilometres square and 2200 kilometres high (21:16), literally built only with gold (21:18b) and its foundations decorated with precious stones (21:19-20), with twelve gates made out of a single pearl and streets of pure gold (21:21), with a river flowing from under God's throne down the middle of the main street, (22:2), etc. If that is the case, then what would the message of this chapter be? What would it mean to live in such a literal city? For example, what would be the message of the literal open gates of the literal city in the future?

The key to interpreting this chapter has already been given in verse 9 and 10: the New Jerusalem is not a literal city, but is a figurative representation or symbol of the bride of the Lamb, which again is not a literal bride of a literal lamb, but is a figurative representation or symbol of the community of believers (the Church) belonging to Jesus Christ. Thus, *the book of Revelation is not a book about future history in which the descriptions and measurements must be taken literally, but it is a book of revelation in which the descriptions and measurements must be taken figuratively or symbolically!* *The city is not simply a literal city, but a figurative description of the community of God's people in the present ideal state as the foreshadow of the community of God's people in the future eternal and completely perfect state.* The various parts described and the measurements are *symbolic of literal truths and realities* in the ideal and eternal state that far surpass the realities of the mere symbols themselves! The parts and measurements have a divine message! For example, the message of figurative open gates of a figurative city is that there are still abundant opportunities to enter the community of God's people (the Church) at the present time (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:1-

- Then the prostitute represents Satan's antichristian culture in connection with the final antichrist (17:15-17).

²⁷ και απηνεγκεν > αποφερω (viaa) με εν πνευματι επι ορος μεγα και υψηλον, και εδειξεν > δεικνυμι (viaa) μοι την πολιν την αγιαν Ιερουσαλημ καταβαινουσαν (νρρα) εκ του ουρανου απο του θεου

2)! The community of God's people is not a closed community, but open towards people of every nationality, language and in every country of the world (cf. Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 12:13)! *The realities of the figurative symbols far surpass the realities of the literal interpretation of the symbols!*

The city before Christ's second coming. The city is the New Jerusalem that is coming down from heaven at the present time. The New Jerusalem coming down from heaven has a past aspect (it was expected: Hebrews 11:10,16), a present aspect (it is being realised: Hebrews 12:22-24) and a future aspect (it will be perfected: Hebrews 13:14; Revelation chapter 21 and 22). At present the city is the Heavenly Jerusalem, which consists of the departed already living in heaven and the living on earth that are registered in heaven (Hebrews 12:22-23).

In John's vision, the New Jerusalem was *coming down (present tense) out of heaven from God* (21:2,10). This is not only the description of the one exclusive future final event, but also the description of a *continual present event* – the city keeps coming down from heaven and produces citizens (Galatians 4:26) until it reaches its final coming down at Christ's second coming! In one respect the New Jerusalem is coming down all the time since Christ's first coming (see 21:2b). In another respect the New Jerusalem will come down finally in her absolute complete and perfect state only at Christ's second coming. At Christ's second coming all resurrected and transformed Christians will first be caught up into the sky to meet and welcome Christ and to marvel at him (Matthew 24:40a,41a; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:10). Then the unbelievers will be brought to the final judgement (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; Matthew 24:40b,41b; 25:31-33). And the earth will be renewed (2 Peter 3:10-13). Finally the unbelievers will depart from Christ into the eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels, the eternal punishment (Matthew 25:41,46a) and the Christians will descend together with Christ as the New Jerusalem onto the new earth and thus inherit the eternal kingdom of God, the eternal life (Matthew 25:34,46b).

The city after Christ's second coming. The final New Jerusalem will be the final state of the community of God's people, the Triumphant Church or God's kingdom in its final perfect phase. It will be the eternal state.

21:11 "It shone with the glory of God and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal."²⁸ The Holy City, Jerusalem, was made of pure gold, as pure as glass (21:18b) and shone with the glory of God. Its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. Jasper is an opaque (not transparent) variety of quartz, usually red, yellow, brown, sometimes green, blue, or white in colour. In antiquity the name was not limited to the variety of quartz now called jasper. Here, it was crystal-clear jasper, perhaps an opal or a diamond. This is a description of *the great value and beauty of God's people*. Nothing on earth is as valuable as his people, because he bought them with his blood (1 Peter 1:18-19).

b. The wall (21:12a,17-18a)

21:12a "It had a great high wall"²⁹ The city had a great, high wall with twelve gates, made of jasper. The walls were 144 cubits thick or high. From the text it is not clear whether the width or height of the wall is meant. But because the height of the city has already been given, *the width or thickness* of the wall is probably meant. It is expressly stated that it is man's measurement, so that the vision stuck to measurements known to man and not to measurements known to angels. Although the measurements are unbelievable for ordinary people, they still have to accept this as proof that God's plan concerning the future Jerusalem far exceeds man's highest imaginations!

The wall before Christ's second coming. The wall is a part of the New Jerusalem that is coming down from heaven at the present time. A cubit equals 45 centimetres. Thus 144 cubits equals about 65 metres (21:17). However, not the actual literal measurement in cubits or metres is important, but the number 144. The symbolic meaning of the number 144 (12x12) could be the protection provided by the Triune God (3) to all his Old Testament and New Testament people (12) in the world (4). The wall symbolises salvation (Isaiah 26:1) or the protection of the Lord himself as a fire around it (Zechariah 2:5). The wall is so thick that it is completely impenetrable and so high that it is completely impregnable! No one can break a hole into it and no one can climb over its wall! It is a symbol that God's people will always be secure in their possession of

²⁸ εχουσαν (vrpa) την δοξαν του θεου ο φωστηρ (light-giving, splendour, radiance, brilliance) αυτης ομοιος λιθω τιμωτατω
ως λιθω ιασπιδι κρυσταλλιζοντι > κρυσταλλιζω (vrpa)

²⁹ εχουσα (vrpa) τειχος μεγα και υψηλον

fellowship with God. Jesus says, “They shall never perish and no one can snatch them out of my hand.” (John 10:28).

The wall after Christ’s second coming. It remains a symbol of the eternal salvation and security of Christians.

c. The gates (21:12b -13,21,25; 22:14-15)

21:12b “with twelve gates and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.”³⁰

21:13 “There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west.”³¹

The city had twelve gates: three gates in each of the four wind directions, thus providing entrance from every direction of earth (cf. Ezekiel 48:31). Each gate was made out of a single pearl, symbolising something very precious. There were twelve angels at the twelve gates. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel were written on the twelve gates. “On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there” (21:25; cf. Isaiah 60:25). Only the people that have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb have the right to the tree of life and the right to enter the gates into the city (22:14). Outside (the city) are the dogs, those who practise magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood (22:15).

The gates before Christ’s second coming. The gates are a part of the New Jerusalem that is coming down from heaven at the present time. Gates symbolise entrance into God’s kingdom (Psalm 24:7-10) in order to belong to the kingdom and in order to have all one’s fountains in her (Psalm 87:1-7). But gates also symbolise the reality and warning that many people will not enter into God’s kingdom, but remain outside (Deuteronomy 23:18; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Colossians 3:5-6; Revelation 21:8).

Open gates symbolise the abundant opportunities for people to enter God’s kingdom (the Church) at the present time (2 Corinthians 6:1-2). Christ is drawing people from every direction in the world to himself (John 12:32) and people from every nation and language is entering God’s kingdom (5:9-10; 7:9; 1 Peter 2:9-10). Open gates symbolise God’s invitation to enter his kingdom without having to pay for it (Isaiah 55:1) or without having to do religious duties (cf. Isaiah 1:10-15) or good works for it (Ephesians 2:8-9). Open gates symbolise the freedom experienced inside the city. The citizens will never be locked up like in a fortress, never locked up in any political or any religious system. They have absolute freedom to enter and will experience only genuine freedom in their fellowship with God. They will experience freedom from the guilt and shame of their former sins; freedom from the slavery of sin; freedom from trying to save themselves by keeping the law and performing religious duties; and freedom from the lies and deceit of Satan and this present evil world (John 8:31-36). Open gates also symbolise the safety inside the walls of the city and experiencing the absence of all kinds of dangers and evil that usually strike at night and would require locked gates.

In Matthew 7:13-14 Jesus Christ urges people to enter his kingdom through the narrow gate. This means that people cannot enter God’s kingdom on their own conditions. The gates of God’s kingdom are not wide as to allow every kind of opinion and every kind of lifestyle to enter in. The gate of God’s kingdom is small and the road that leads to life is narrow.

Do these two ways lead up to two gates at the end of these roads? Or do these two gates lead to two different ways of life? Does a person follow one of these ways in order to enter one of these gates? Or does he enter one of these gates in order to be admitted to one of these ways? The presentation that the ways come first and the gates come last has become quite popular among Christians and Christian artists. Some Christians appeal to Luke 13:23-30 to prove that the way comes first and leads up to the gate. Jesus says, “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.” However, the wording and the context of Luke 13:23-30 is definitely different than the wording and context of Matthew 7:13-14. In Matthew 7 he speaks of a gate and a way, while in Luke 13 he speaks of neither, but only of a door. In Matthew 7, Jesus speaks of entering God’s kingdom in its present form on earth and of the present life in God’s kingdom on earth. However, in Luke 13:23-30, he speaks of perseverance until the second coming and of entering God’s kingdom in its final (end-time) stage (Matthew 25:10). In Matthew 7,

³⁰ εχουσα (νρη) πυλωνας δωδεκα, και επι τοις πυλωσιν αγγελους δωδεκα, και ονοματα επιγεγραμμενα (νρη) α εστιν (νρη)
[τα ονοματα] των δωδεκα φυλων υιων Ισραηλ

³¹ απο ανατολης πυλωνες τρεις, και απο βορρα πυλωνες τρεις, και απο νοτου πυλωνες τρεις, και απο δυσμων πυλωνες τρεις

Jesus mentions both gates *before* mentioning both ways. The text stresses the close relation between the gate and the way. But it does not say “the gate *or* the way”, as if their order is reversible. The text clearly says “the gate *and* the way”, showing that the gate comes *before* the way!

By entering the gates in Matthew 7, Jesus is not thinking of death or his second coming, but of *the choice* a person makes right now in life. A person’s initial choice in life will determine the way he lives on earth as well as his final destiny! ‘The gate’ represents *the initial choice in life* and ‘the way’ represents *the way a person lives after he made the choice*.

The main message of the parable of the two gates and two ways in Matthew 7:13-14 is the following. “*The initial choice a person makes in life determines the way he lives on earth as well as his final destination!*” The two-fold exhortation *to enter* the narrow gate and *not to enter* the wide gate includes the two subordinate arguments. In the first place it is natural to prefer what is wide, broad and easy to access to what is narrow and constricted. In the second place it is also natural to follow the crowd rather than the few. Therefore, beware *what* you choose!

“Entering God’s kingdom on God’s condition” is one of the basic characteristics of God’s kingdom. No one will enter God’s kingdom on his own condition! God’s condition to enter God’s kingdom is to enter via the narrow gate and thereafter to walk on the narrow way. From the Bible we know that *the narrow gate* can only refer to faith in Jesus Christ and his accomplished work of salvation (Luke 10:25-26; John 10:9; 14:6; Acts 4:12). From the context we know that *the narrow way* refers to the Sermon on the Mount. After a person has been saved by grace through faith, he should walk in the manner of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapter 5 to 7). The people of God’s kingdom enter through the narrow gate and thereafter walk along the narrow way. Their initial choice determines the way they live in this present world and their final destination in the world to come.

The gates after Christ’s second coming. From the standpoint of the new heaven and new earth, throughout history and especially during the whole New Testament period from Christ’s first coming to Christ’s second coming there has been abundant opportunity to enter God’s kingdom (the Church, the New Jerusalem) by faith in Jesus Christ. No person will ever make any excuse that he did not know or that he had no opportunity to enter – every mouth will be silenced (Romans 1:18-20; 2:11-16; 3:19-20). After the second coming, the people belonging to God’s community will never again feel threatened by danger anymore!

d. The angels at the gates (21:12c)

The angels at the gates are guards at the gates let the right people in and keep the wrong people out. They are both real angels, the messengers of God in heaven, and symbolic angels, the messengers of God on earth.

The angels before Christ’s second coming. The angels at the gates are a part of the New Jerusalem that is coming down from heaven at the present time. They guard the gates, by upholding truth and by refuting error (Titus 1:9), thus hindering godless and wicked people from entering (21:27; cf. Isaiah 62:6; Matthew 18:15-18; 1 Corinthians 5:12-13). Christ is now in the process of excluding people from his kingdom: people who have no faith (Matthew 8:10-12; John 3:36), who harden themselves and refuse to repent (Matthew 11:20-24; Romans 1:18), who reject Jesus Christ (Matthew 21:42-44; Luke 10:16), who do not wear the wedding clothes Christ provides (Matthew 22:11-14; Romans 13:14) and who are not ready for Christ’s second coming (Matthew 25:10-13)! And Christ is now in the process of including people in his kingdom (Matthew 16:18-19; John 3:3-8; 12:31-32; Colossians 1:13). The symbolic angels or messengers are the offices within the community of God’s people. In the Old Testament they were the prophets and priests and kings. In the New Testament they are the elders of the congregations (cf. 1:20; 2:1). They must give to God an account of their ministry on earth (Hebrews 13:7,17).

The angels after Christ’s second coming. At Christ’s second coming, Christ will send his real angels from heaven to gather the elect everywhere on earth (Matthew 24:31) and make use of his human angels in the final judgement (Matthew 19:28; 1 Corinthians 6:3). They will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil and throw them into hell (Matthew 13:41-42). Nothing impure will ever enter the New Jerusalem in its final perfect phase on the new earth! All godless and wicked people and their evil works will be cast into the lake of burning sulphur (21:8).

e. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the gates (21:12d)

Because the names of the tribes are not listed as in Revelation 7:5-8 (Ezekiel 48:31), there is no ground to speculate whether Dan and Ephraim would be excluded. The picture represents something more than the mere names! Like the nameplates on our front doors, this is a description of the people that dwell in the city and that belong to the community of God's people. Only those who belong to God's people may enter the gates and live in this city.

The names of the twelve tribes before Christ's second coming. The names of the twelve tribes are a part of the New Jerusalem that has come down in the past and is coming down from heaven at the present time. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel are especially a symbol for God's Old Testament people. This fact makes abundantly clear that all the believers during the whole Old Testament period are part of God's one people, the New Jerusalem, the Bride, the Church (the called out ones)(cf. 2 Chronicles 29:28³²; Hebrews 11:39-40).

But the twelve tribes mentioned in James 1:1 is equally a symbol of God's New Testament people (compare James 1:1 with 1 Peter 1:1; Romans 2:28-29 with Galatians 6:15-16; Romans 9:6 with Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:5-6; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Titus 2:14 and 1 Peter 2:4-10). This fact makes abundantly clear that all the believers during the New Testament period may also be called 'the Israel of God' (Galatians 6:16).

Jesus said, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be *one flock and one shepherd*" (John 10:16; cf. Romans 10:12-13; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11).

f. The foundations (21:14)

21:14 "The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."³³ Again because the names of the apostles are not listed, there is no ground to speculate whether Judas, Matthias or Paul would be the twelfth apostle. The picture represents something more than the mere names!

The names of the twelve apostles before Christ's second coming. The names of the twelve apostles are a part of the New Jerusalem that is coming down from heaven at the present time. This is another description of the people that dwell in the city and that belong to the community of God's people. Only those who belong to God's people will live in the city, that is, will constitute the city. The twelve apostles especially symbolise God's New Testament people. The New Testament Church is built on the foundation of the apostles (John 15:27; Acts 1:8,21-22; Ephesians 2:20) who through their preaching established the first historic congregations among the Jews (Acts chapter 2), Samaritans (Acts chapter 8) and the Gentiles (Acts chapter 10-11). Only the apostles are the foundational leaders of the Church, because Christ used them to establish the first historical congregations (Matthew 16:18-19; 18:18; Ephesians 2:20). In a way the prophets are also part of this foundation of God's people: the Old Testament prophets preached the message through their writings (1 Peter 1:9-12; Hebrews 1:1) and the New Testament prophets through their encouragements (Acts 15:32; cf. 1 Corinthians 14:3). The absolute foundation of the people of God in the Old Testament is Jesus Christ (Isaiah 28:16) and the absolute foundation of the people of God in the New Testament is also Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11).

By uniting the names of the twelve apostles of Christ with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel Christ indicates the unity of God's New Testament people with God's Old Testament people! In salvation history God's Old Testament people, Israel, was not terminated or replaced, but continued and extended to include God's New Testament people, the Church. God has only one people! There is only one Shepherd and only one flock of sheep that originate in a great number of sheepfolds (John 10:16).

³² The 'assembly' of Israel is called 'church' (εκκλησια) in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Judges 20:2; Psalm 22:22).

³³ και το τειχος της πολεις εχων (ντρα) θεμελιους δωδεκα, και επ αυτων δωδεκα ονοματα των δωδεκα αποστολων του αρνιου

g. The size and shape of the city (21:15-16)

21:15 “The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls.”³⁴

21:16 “The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12 000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long.”³⁵

Measuring is a symbolic action symbolising that the people of God are set apart in order to be protected against all evil and are marked out as being his people (11:1-2). In the vision, the city had the form of a cube. Its length, width and height were exactly the same: 12 000 stadia. A stadia equals 192 metres. Thus 12 000 stadia equals about 2200 to 2300 kilometres. However, not the actual literal measurement in stadia or kilometres is important, but the number 12 000. The number 12 000 is the product of $3 \times 4 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10$. In biblical numerology the number 3 represents the Triune God, the number 4 represents the four corners of the earth, the number 10 represents completeness on earth and the number 1 000 ($10 \times 10 \times 10$) represents absolute completeness on earth that has been ordained (planned) and executed by God himself. Therefore, the number $12\,000 \times 12\,000 \times 12\,000$ expresses the complete and perfect result of the saving power and transforming grace of the Triune God on earth in terms of the shape of the city.

Compare the complete and perfect number of people (144 000) sealed at the beginning of salvation history (7:4) and redeemed at the end of salvation history (14:1) in terms of the number of tribes (12) and the number of apostles (12). The number is a symbol of the result of the saving power and transforming grace of the Triune God on earth. It is nothing less than the sum-total of all God’s Old Testament and New Testament people, the Triumphant Church in its final phase or the kingdom of God in its final phase when the full number of all believers have come in (Romans 11:25-26).

The length, width and height of the city were exactly the same. Thus, the city had the form of a great cube.³⁶ This cube form was foreshadowed by the Holy of holies in the tabernacle and temple of Solomon (1 Kings 6:20), which was regarded as the dwelling of God (Psalm 46:4-5; Hebrews 9:12,24). The New Jerusalem is a symbol of the eternal state of the community of God’s people, the final state of the Triumphant Church, when the full number of God’s people has been gathered together. It is a symbol of the final phase of the kingdom of God.

The New Jerusalem is here also a symbol of the eternal dwelling of God. The community of God’s people (the Church) is not only symbolically the temple or dwelling of God at the present time (cf. Ephesians 2:19-22), but will also be symbolically the eternal temple or dwelling of God in the eternal state (cf. 21:3,11,16). The book of Revelation can only be symbolic, because while in Ephesians 2:19-22 the Church (the community of God’s people) is called the temple of God, in Revelation 21:22 God himself and the Lamb are themselves called the temple of the community of God’s people in the eternal state (cf. Isaiah 4:5-6; 8:14)!

Conclusion. The cube of 12 000 stadia on each side is a symbol of the complete number and perfection of the community of God (the Church) in the eternal state and at the same time a symbol that God himself will dwell in them forever (21:16; Ephesians 2:22) and be their sanctuary forever (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:28).

The measuring of the city before Christ’s second coming. The measuring of the city is a part of the New Jerusalem that is coming down from heaven at the present time. Before Christ’s second coming God’s trumpet judgements and bowl judgements are executed over the godless and wicked world. Although Christians are not necessarily protected from trials (persecutions) and temptations (seductions) (cf. Matthew 5:11-12; 10:28; 2 Timothy 3:12), they are completely safe with God. They are protected from going lost and being condemned together with the godless and evil world (cf. John 6:37-40; 10:27-30)!

The measured city after Christ’s second coming. The measuring of the city is also a part of the New Jerusalem that has finally come down at Christ’s second coming. After Christ’s second coming, the process of measuring as a symbolic action of protection is no longer a consideration. The completion of the action is rather emphasised. The measured city is a symbol of the complete perfection and glory of the people of God

³⁴ Και ο λαλων (vpra) μετ εμου ειχεν (viia) μετρον καλαμον χρυσουν, ινα μετρηση (vsaa) την πολιν και τους πυλωνας αυτης και το τειχος αυτης

³⁵ και η πολις τετραγωνος κειται > κειμαι (virm), και το μηκος αυτης οσον [και] το πλατος. και εμετρησεν (viaa) την πολιν τω καλαμω επι σταδιων δωδεκα χιλιαδων. το μηκος και το πλατος και το υψος αυτης ισα εστιν (vira)

³⁶ Not the form of a pyramid (Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom, p. 334), because the Most Holy Place in the temple was a cube, not a pyramid.

in the final and perfect state and of their final complete number. It is a description of the great size, beautiful symmetry (Psalm 48:12-13; Ezekiel 40:3ff) and the complete separation of the community of God's people (the Bride, the Church) from what is unholy (Leviticus 10:10; Ezekiel 22:26; 42:20; 44:23; cf. Revelation 11:1; 1 John 3:1-3). But the final sum-total of all God's people cannot be counted by man (cf. 7:9).

21:17 “He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits (thick), by man’s measurement, which the angel was using.”³⁷

21:18 “The wall was made of (literally: the material of the wall) jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass.”³⁸ See the wall and the city above.

h. The precious stones on the foundations (21:19-20)

21:19 “The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald”³⁹

21:20 “the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.”⁴⁰

The twelve foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The twelve precious stones have different textures and colours. Although they resemble the precious stones in the breast piece of the high priest (Exodus 28:17-21; 39:10-14), there is no allusion to any connection with the high priest. It is rather the city to which the prophet Isaiah refers in the Old Testament, the city that God would build with stones of turquoise, the foundations with sapphires, the battlements with rubies, the gates with sparkling jewels and the walls with precious stones (Isaiah 54:1,5,11-12). The names designated to these precious stones in ancient times are not always the same in modern times.

Jasper is an opaque (not transparent) variety of quartz, usually red, yellow, brown, sometimes green, blue or white in colour. In antiquity the name was not limited to the variety of quartz now called jasper. Here it is crystal-clear jasper, perhaps an opal or a diamond. Jasper is used to describe the glorious appearance (radiance) of God (4:3), the glorious appearance of the city (21:11) and of the wall (21:18).

Sapphire is a blue, transparent precious stone, but the ancients probably understood it to be the lapis lazuli. Sapphire is used to describe the pavement under God's feet (Exodus 24:9-11), the foundation of Jerusalem (Isaiah 54:11) and the throne of God (Ezekiel 1:26).

Chalcedony is today known as agate, onyx, carnelian, etc. and is possibly green or red.

Emerald is a bright green transparent stone. Emerald is used to describe the rainbow encircling God's throne and is a symbol of his salvation and faithfulness (4:3).

Sardonyx is a variety of agate (banded chalcedony).

Carnelian is a reddish precious stone. Carnelian is used to describe the appearance of God in his function as Judge (4:3).

Chrysolite is a golden-yellow topaz.

Beryl is a precious stone of sea-green colour.

Topaz is a bright yellow, more or less transparent precious stone, in ancient times often made into seals and gems.

Chrysoprase is an apple green, fine grained hornstone (variety of quartz), coloured by nickel oxide and highly translucent.

Jacinth is a flower and also a precious stone, perhaps dark blue in colour. Jacinth is used to describe the breastplates of the horses and riders (9:17).

Amethyst is purple or violet quartz.

The precious stones before Christ's second coming. The precious stones are a part of the New Jerusalem that is coming down from heaven at the present time. However, there is no allusion in the Bible to the specific meaning of each of these stones. Together, these precious stones symbolise the dazzling attraction of the city,

³⁷ και μετρησεν (viaa) το τειχος αυτης εκατον τεσσερακοντα τεσσαρων πηχων, μετρον ανθρωπου, ο εστιν (vira) αγγελου

³⁸ και η ενδομησις (construction, material) του τειχους (city wall) αυτης ιασπις, και η πολις χρυσιον καθαρον ομοιον υαλω (glass, crystal) καθαρω

³⁹ οι θεμελιοι του τειχους της πολεως παντι λιθω τιμω κεκοσμημενοι (vnp). ο θεμελιος ο πρωτος ιασπις, ο δευτερος σαπφιρος, ο τριτος χαλκηδων, ο τεταρτος σμαραγδος

⁴⁰ ο πεμπτος σαρδονυξ, ο εκτος σαρδιον, ο εβδομος χρυσολιθος, ο ογδοος βηρυλλος, ο ενατος τοπαζιον, ο δεκατος χρυσοπρασος, ο ενδεκατος βακινθος, ο δωδεκατος αμεθυστος

the community of God's people in the world. The New Jerusalem (the Church) is the light of the world like a city on a hill that cannot be hidden (Matthew 5:14). It is God's community of love that points people to Christ's love (John 13:34-35). And it is God's community that radiates and proclaims the manifold virtues and wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10).

The precious stones after Christ's second coming. The precious stones are also a part of the New Jerusalem that has finally come down at Christ's second coming. In the eternal state the Church will forever be the Bride of the Lamb that remains radiant, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish (Ephesians 5:27).

i. The streets (21:21b; 22:2)

21:21 "The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl."⁴¹

"The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass."⁴² The word 'street' or 'avenue' is in the singular, but in the original language it can express collective meaning: every avenue or everything that is an avenue. The function of an avenue is to give easy access to something, in this case, access to God.

Like the city, its streets were made of pure gold. This must be symbolic, because the pure gold was transparent like glass. The transparency points to the fact that no spiritual or moral dirt remains that would hinder the approach to God. All sins have been paid for and atoned.

The streets before Christ's second coming. The streets are a part of the New Jerusalem that is coming down from heaven at the present time. They symbolise the easy access to the God of the Bible and the perfect and open character of fellowship with God. At Christ's first coming the curtain that blocked free access to God was torn (Matthew 27:51). Since then believers from the Jews and believers from the non-Jewish nations have equal access to God the Father through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:18) and may approach God with freedom and confidence (Ephesians 3:12; Hebrews 4:14-16).

The streets after Christ's second coming. The streets are also a part of the New Jerusalem that has finally come down at Christ's second coming. While access to God was an invisible spiritual experience before Christ's second coming, it will be the visible spiritual reality for every believer after Christ's second coming. Believers will see God in Christ and visibly fellowship with him in the eternal state.

j. The temple (21:22)

21:22 "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple."⁴³

The temple before Christ's first coming. During the Old Testament period, the cloud of the glory of God (the manifestation of God's presence and glorious characteristics) was limited to the most holy place in the tabernacle or temple and God's Old Testament people worshipped God there (Exodus 9:33; 40:34-38).

During the period of the first temple, God's people were pictured as continually dwelling in a spiritual sense in the temple court, that is, they were living in continual fellowship with God (Psalm 27:4; 36:8; 65:4). Therefore Mount Zion (the temple mountain) is pictured as stretching over the whole earth (Isaiah 11:9)!

After the second temple in Jerusalem together with Jerusalem was destroyed (70 A.D.), the popular expectation among the Jews clung to the literal rebuilding of the earthly city of Jerusalem and the literal rebuilding of a temple at its centre (Isaiah 2:2-4).

However, the prophets spoke of the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple, not in literal terms, but in terms that far surpass its mere literal meaning (Isaiah 44:28; Ezekiel chapters 40 to 48). The Old Testament prophets were not serving a revived national Judaism, but God's New Testament elect (1 Peter 1:1-2,9-12). They were prophesying, that after the return of the remnant of Israel from exile in Babylon to the land of Israel God would pour out his Holy Spirit on people of all nations (Ezekiel 36:24-27; Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17-21). God would make an end of the literal temple and its literal religious ceremonies (Psalm 40:6-7; Isaiah

⁴¹ και οι δωδεκα πυλωνες δωδεκα μαργαριται ανα εις εκαστος των πυλωνων ην (viiia) εξ ενος μαργαριτου

⁴² και η πλατεια της πολεως χρυσιον καθαρον ως υαλος διαυγης (transparent, pure)

⁴³ Και ναον ουκ ειδον (viiia) εν αυτη, ο γαρ κυριος ο θεος ο παντοκρατωρ ναος αυτης εστιν (viiia), και το αρνιον,

1:13-18; 66:1-2; Jeremiah 3:15-17; 6:19-20; 7:12-15; Amos 5:21-24; Malachi 1:10-11; Hebrews 10:1-21), build the future spiritual temple through the Messiah king-priest (Zechariah 6:12-13) and spread the worship of God in Spirit and truth from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (John 4:21-24; Acts 1:8). God would no longer make the earthly Jerusalem, but the Heavenly Jerusalem the focal point of people of all the nations (Isaiah 2:2-4; Hebrews 11:10,16; 12:22-24; 13:14)! The prophet Ezekiel called the future messianic city: "The Lord is there" (Ezekiel 48:35) and the prophet Joel prophesied, "The Lord will be a refuge and stronghold for his people." "The Lord dwells in Zion" (Joel 3:14-21).

The temple before Christ's second coming. The absence of a temple is a part of the New Jerusalem that is coming down from heaven at the present time. At the first coming of Jesus Christ all literal religious buildings cease to have any meaning. It was no longer the temple, but Christ himself who completely revealed the visible presence of God and his glorious characteristics to his people (Matthew 12:6; John 1:14,18; Colossians 1:15; 2:9). When Jesus was crucified and killed the literal temple of the Jews ceased to have meaning (Matthew 27:51; John 2:13-22; Acts 7:48-49; 17:24-25). When Jesus was resurrected from the dead and poured his Spirit out on believers, God's spiritual temple came into existence. During the whole New Testament period the Church as a whole is symbolically God's temple in which he dwells through his Holy Spirit (21:22; cf. Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5,9-10). From then onwards fellowship with God is no longer practised in a particular religious building or by means of particular religious ceremonies. God's people worship God in Spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). There is no longer any room for a literal and limiting earthly temple (Act 7:48-49; 17:24-28).

The temple after Christ's second coming. In the final state, the radiance of God's majesty and glory will not be limited to a particular place anymore, but will manifest itself visibly everywhere in the community of his people (21:11). And God's people will worship him directly and perfectly. Not only will God dwell in the community of his people (21:3,11,16), but the community of his people will dwell in God and the Lamb (7:15; 21:22; cf. John 14:10-11; 17:20-26)! The Lord God Almighty and Jesus Christ are symbolically and spiritually its temple! God will spread his tent over them and they will serve him day and night in his temple (7:15), that is, serve God directly and continually in his presence. This is a description of the universal, continual and intimate relationship between God and God's people in the eternal state.

k. The light (21:23; 22:5)

21:23 "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp."⁴⁴ The New Jerusalem will not need the light of the sun or the moon. It will not need artificial lights like lamps in the city, because God and Christ are its light.

The light before Christ's second coming. The light is a part of the New Jerusalem that is coming down from heaven at the present time. Throughout the Old Testament period God's people were looking forward to the coming light, the Messiah (Isaiah 9:2; 42:6; 49:6; cf. Matthew 4:16; Acts 13:47). Isaiah already prophesied that the light of the New Jerusalem would not be the natural lights of the sun and moon, but the everlasting and glorious light of the Lord himself (Isaiah 60:19), the light of his justice, righteousness and salvation (Isaiah 51:4-6). People from every nation on earth would be drawn to this light (Isaiah 60:1-3) and walk in its light (Isaiah 2:5). He spoke of that aspect of the New Jerusalem that is coming down at the present time.

At Christ's first coming "Christ is the true light that gives light to every man" (John 1:9). This does not mean that Christ saves every man. In John 1:9 the Bible does not teach universal salvation and in John 1:29 it does not teach universal atonement. The light Christ brings to every man is that he gives to every man knowledge about the existence of God and some knowledge about the nature of God (Romans 1:19-20; 2:15). And he gives to every man who hears the gospel more or less knowledge about God's plan of salvation. No one can later make any excuse (Romans 3:19-20). In spite of this, many people in the world still choose the darkness (John 1:5,10-11). There is thus an enlightenment that does not lead to salvation (Hebrews 6:4-6)! The enlightenment that leads to salvation is pure grace (2 Corinthians 4:6)!

The expected Light came to the Jewish nation (Matthew 4:16-17; John 1:9-11), but only a remnant of them put their trust in this Light (John 12:35-41). The Light also came to the Gentile nations (Acts 13:47; 26:23) and those, who by pure grace were appointed for eternal life, believed in the Light (Acts 13:48). And they

⁴⁴ και η πολις ου χρειαν εχει (νιρα) του ηλιου ουδε της σεληνης, ινα φαινωσιν > φαινω (vspa) αυτη, η γαρ δοξα του θεου ε φωτισεν (viaa) αυτην, και ο λυχνος αυτης το αρνιον

walked in this light (Ephesians 5:8-9; 1 John 1:5,7; 2:9-10). This is that aspect of the New Jerusalem that is coming down at the present time. The community of God's people has Jesus Christ as the Light.

While the word 'life' represents God's attributes or characteristics, the word 'light' represents the perfect revelation of God's attributes or characteristics (John 1:4-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 2 Corinthians 4:6). Jesus Christ is the light of the world, that is, the visible revelation of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15; 2:9), the revelation of who God is and what God says and does. Christ is the light of the world (John 8:12) and drives away the darkness of ignorance, misery, guilt, shame, moral pollution and judicial perversion. Because he imparts the true and saving knowledge of God and all his characteristics like righteousness and holiness to believers, he is specifically called the lamp of the city (21:23).

The light after Christ's second coming. At Christ's second coming the natural lights of the sun and moon and stars will come to an end (Matthew 24:29,35). Because God in Christ is now visibly present everywhere on the new earth, dwelling among his redeemed people, there will never be physical, moral or spiritual darkness anymore! The light in the New Jerusalem on the new earth will be the continual and perfect revelation of God's attributes or characteristics to God's people. Before the second coming believers live by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 4:18; 5:7), but after the second coming they will see Jesus Christ face to face (22:4; cf. John 17:24; 1 John 3:2)! In God's presence on the new earth there can be no darkness at all.

1. The nations (21:24-26)

21:24 "The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth (will) bring their splendour into it."⁴⁵

The nations before Christ's second coming. Isaiah already prophesied that the nations would walk by the light of Zion, the City of the Lord, (21:24; cf. Isaiah 60:3) and the kings of the earth would bring their splendour into it (21:24,26; cf. Isaiah 60:5,10-14). He spoke of that aspect of the New Jerusalem that is coming down from heaven at the present time. Both the nations and their splendour would enter the community of God's people.

At his first coming Christ bound Satan and he is now in the process of drawing people from every nation into his kingdom (5:9-10; 20:3; Matthew 28:18-19; John 12:31-32; Romans 10:12-13; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:3-6; Colossians 3:11; 1 Peter 2:9-10). This is part of that aspect of the New Jerusalem that is coming down from heaven at the present time. People from every nation on earth will walk by the light radiated from the Heavenly Jerusalem, the Church (Isaiah 9:2; 42:6; 49:6; 60:3,19; Malachi 4:2; Galatians 4:26).

The conversion and Christianisation of the Gentile nations also brings with it enormous temporary blessings, like good and transparent government, education, health and social services, justice, mass communication, better job opportunities and living conditions, attractive art, music, dance, healthy sports and leisure activities, etc. These are the healthy fruits of healthy trees and they contribute to the extension of God's kingdom! Nevertheless, before Christ's second coming, this is not yet the complete and perfect situation on earth. History has also shown that wherever Christ and the gospel are again rejected, also these healthy fruits disappear again.

The nations after Christ's second coming. However, after Christ's second coming, this will be the complete and perfect situation on the new earth! When the New Jerusalem is on the new earth, then people from every tribe, language and nation will dwell forever in the city, that is, in the community of God's people (5:9-10). The people will not all be the same. There will be a great variety of people, with different personalities and abilities, gifts and skills. The image of God will be fully restored in each believer and all of them together will reflect this image. Those whose names are written in Christ's book of life (20:15) will be in the New Jerusalem. Also "their deeds will follow them" into the New Jerusalem (14:13)! Whatever in their personalities and culture stood the test of the fire of judgement, whatever is glorious and honourable; all this splendour will be in the New Jerusalem. Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8) – all such things in all the nations on the present earth will be in the New Jerusalem. Think of science, skills, music, songs, poetry, art, writings and all kinds of works that glorify God. God's people will enjoy all this splendour, glory and honour that reflect God's image (Ephesians 4:24) and God's multicoloured blessings

⁴⁵ και περιπατησουσιν (vifa) τα εθνη δια του φωτος αυτης. και ο βασιλεις της γης φερουσιν (vira) την δοξαν αυτων εις αυτην.

(Ephesians 1:3) in the nations forever! Thus, the community of God's people in the eternal state will not be a uniform group of people, but will be characterised by diversity, many-coloured wisdom, skills and beauty!

21:25 “On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there.”⁴⁶

21:26 “The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it.”⁴⁷

m. Those included and those excluded (21:27)

21:27 “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.”⁴⁸

The New Jerusalem before Christ's second coming. The kingdom of God in its present earthly phase has a mixed character: nominal believers associate themselves with the genuine believers (Matthew 13: 24-30; 36-43). However, the Heavenly Jerusalem consists only of believers who still live on earth (the firstborn), whose names are written in the book of life in heaven, as well as the spirits of believers who have already departed from this earth and are together with God, Christ and all the angels in heaven (Hebrews 12:22-24).

All ungodly and wicked people are kept out of this city of God by the angels standing at the gates (21:12). The twelve angels or messengers represent the faithful servants of the true Gospel, doing God's work in this present world (3x4=12). Christ is now in the process of purifying his Church by pruning and by cutting off. On the one hand he cuts off the fruitless deeds of his own people so that they will bear more and better fruit (John 15:2). On the other hand he cuts off people who never bear any fruit at all (John 15:6). The leaders of the congregations should not cut off nominal believers, because they cannot see into their hearts (Matthew 13:24-30,26-43), but they should exercise church discipline whenever there is evident wickedness (1 Corinthians 5:9-13). This is part of that aspect of the New Jerusalem that is coming down from heaven at the present time.

The New Jerusalem after Christ's second coming. At Christ's second coming, Christ and his angels will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil and throw them into hell (Matthew 13:41-42). Nothing impure will ever enter the New Jerusalem in its final perfect phase on the new earth! All godless and wicked people and their evil works will be cast into the lake of burning sulphur (21:8). Even nominal Christians, who have secretly slipped in among God's genuine people before the second coming, will suffer the punishment of eternal fire (Jude 1:4,7; Matthew 13:49-50). However, genuine Christians, whose names have been written in the Lamb's book of life (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:15) need not fear for a moment about their eternal security (Matthew 13:43; John 10:28).

n. Different views about the city (21:2)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The New Jerusalem and the bride are identical (21:9-10) in the sense that *the New Jerusalem is the (literal) home and residence of the bride*. The city would be literally 1500x1500x1500 miles (2200 to 2300 kilometres) in size and in the form of a pyramid. The light will only be in the city and not in the outlying parts of the new earth, because there it will be day and night. The city is made of gold, thus, the redeemed will live in palaces of transparent gold!⁴⁹

Second view. (The correct explanation) The New Jerusalem is not a literal city, but another *symbol* for the bride, the community of God's people. The dimensions are not literal, but symbolic of God dwelling in their midst (the cube, 1 Kings 6:20). The visible presence of God is not limited to a literal city somewhere on the new earth, but is everywhere on the new earth where the community of God dwells. The visible presence of God thus makes the light of the sun, moon and stars obsolete on the whole new earth (21:23; Matthew 24:29,35).

⁴⁶ και οι πολωνες αυτης ου μη κλεισθωσιν > κλειω (vsap) ημερας, νυξ γαρ ουκ εσται (vifm) εκει

⁴⁷ και οι σουσιν > φερω (vifa) την δοξαν και την τιμην των εθνων εις αυτην (φερω, οισω, ηνεγκα)

⁴⁸ και ου μη εισελθη (vsaa) εις αυτην παν κοινον και [ο] ποιων (vppa) βδελυγμα και ψευδος, ει μη οι γεγραμμενοι (vppp)

εν τω βιβλιω της ζωης του αρνιου

⁴⁹ Larkin, Revelation pp. 203-205

o. Different views about the nations (21:24-27)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The nations are the Gentiles excluding the Jews. They will live outside the walls of the literal city, while the Jews will live inside the city. People will increase and multiply on the new earth and repopulate the new earth. If this were not God's plan, then we have one type in the Scriptures (Noah's ark) that would have no anti-type. After this new earth becomes full, God will begin to repopulate the other planets. The people on the new earth are only "the first fruits" of his creatures (James 1:18). The present human race is only at the beginning of things that would happen in the universe (Isaiah 9:7).⁵⁰

Second view. (The correct explanation) The nations are believers in Jesus Christ from every nation, language and tribe (including the Jews) (5:9-10; cf. Matthew 28:19). They will live with God within the community of God's saved people (symbolised by the New Jerusalem) on the new earth. And they will bring into that community on the new earth everything that stood God's test of fire (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

⁵⁰ Larkin, Revelation pp. 206-207