

## INTRODUCTION to REVELATION chapter 21

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## 1 THE THEME

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

## 2 THE STRUCTURE

Revelation chapter 1 to 20 described in apocalyptic terms Church history within world history. That history has come to an end. Christ's second coming and the final judgement day have taken place (20:11-15).

Revelation chapter 21 to 22 is a vision that describes the new world and its glorious relationships.

However, the new world is described in three ways:

- (1) The new world is described *with the pictures of the old past age* (Jerusalem, its foundations, wall and gates, the tribes, the apostles, the bride of the Lamb, the nations and the shining sun).
- (2) The new world is described *as being the ideal for the present age*.
- (3) The new world is described *as being the reality of the coming age*.

Revelation chapter 21 and 22 is a picture of the redeemed and transformed universe *after* Christ's second coming as foreshadowed by the redeemed Church *before* Christ's second coming.

### [a. The renewal of creation \(21:1-8\)](#)

The old creation must be renewed.

The first creation resembles the seed, the history within the books of the Bible resembles the growing plant and the new creation resembles the fully developed and beautiful flower. Genesis describes the creation of heaven and earth that was very good (Genesis 1:31), yet Revelation describes the new heaven and earth (21:1). Something had happened to the first creation.

The book of Genesis describes the fall of man into sin that brought degeneration, corruption and death to everything in the first creation. The Old Testament books describe the preparation and prophecies about the coming Redeemer and the renewal he will bring. The New Testament books describe the coming of the Redeemer, the atonement of sins, the regeneration of God's people and the establishment of God's kingdom (that includes the Church). The book of Revelation reveals the complete and perfect renewal of all things: God as he reveals himself in Christ, the Mediator, makes everything new (21:5). Thus, what God had purposed in the beginning, comes into being and no one and nothing will thwart his purpose (Isaiah 14:24,27)!

The renewed creation surpasses the old creation by far.

In Genesis the luminaries (sun, moon and stars) are called into being because they were needed, but in Revelation the luminaries are no longer needed (21:23). Genesis describes a paradise that was lost, while Revelation pictures a paradise that is restored beyond the old paradise, because temptations, sin and death are no longer possible (22:1-2)! Genesis shows man barred from the tree of life, while Revelation shows man having the right to the tree of life (22:14). Genesis describes the cunning and power of Satan, while Revelation pictures Satan bound and finally hurled into hell (20:2,10). Genesis pictures man hiding himself from the presence of God, while Revelation pictures God dwelling with man (21:3).

God's covenant reaches its complete fulfilment.

The New Jerusalem is prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband (21:2). God's covenant in the Old Testament period with Abraham (Genesis 17:7) continued with Moses and the people of Israel (Exodus 6:2-8), with king David and the Levites (kings and priests) (Jeremiah 33:17-26) and was promised to the remnant that would return from exile (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 11:17-20; 36:25-28) and their coming Messiah (Jeremiah 30:21-22; 33:14-16; Ezekiel 34:23-26). God's covenant continued in the New Testament period with the Church (Romans 4:1-17; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Galatians 3:26-29) and finally reaches its complete and visible fulfilment on the new earth: "God himself dwells among his people; they are his people and he is their God" (21:3). God's people will see his face (the face of Jesus Christ)(22:4). The book of Revelation describes the blessedness of God's people that may dwell on the new earth. But the book of Revelation also mentions who will be excluded (21:8; 22:15).

The theme of the book.

This contrast between Genesis and Revelation confirms the theme of the book of Revelation: "Not Satan, but Christ is victorious (Genesis 3:15; Revelation 17:14)!" Although for a time God's eternal plan seems (thus not really) defeated, in the end is seen to triumph completely. Christ is the Conqueror (6:1-2) and in all these things (trials and persecutions, temptations and seductions) we are more than conquerors through him who loved us (Romans 8:37)."

#### **b. The renewal of God's people (21:9 to 22:5)**

The New Jerusalem is pictured as the bride of the Lamb (21:9-10; cf. Ephesians 5:25-27), as a very beautiful and measured city (21:11-21; cf. Ephesians 2:19-22; Hebrews 11:10,16), as the new humanity (21:22-27; cf. Ephesians 2:14-18) and finally as the new paradise (22:1-5; cf. Ephesians 1:10). An angel shows John the New Jerusalem, its beauty, its costly materials, its form and its dimensions. He describes that God in Christ is its temple and light; the nations and their glory is brought into it, but nothing impure, shameful or deceitful will enter it. The angel also shows John the river of life and tree of life. He sees the throne of God and what his servants do forever and ever.

### **3 THE CONTENTS**

The Old Testament prophets prophesied the creation of the new heavens and new earth (Zechariah 14:4,6,7). In Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22 God says, "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. ... The new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me."

In the New Testament this is called "the renewal of all things" (Matthew 19:28; cf. Revelation 21:5), "the restoration of everything" (Acts 3:21), "the liberation of creation from its bondage to decay" (Romans 8:21) and no longer will the creation be subjected to frustration (Romans 8:20). Throughout the New Testament, Christians are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness (2 Peter 3:13).

#### **a. There will be no future literal earthly millennial kingdom**

The teaching in the book of Revelation is not about a literal paradisiacal, yet imperfect, earthly millennial kingdom, which lasts only for 1000 literal years. The teaching of the book of Revelation is about the kingdom of God in its present developing phase and the kingdom of God in its future perfect phase. In its present developing phase since Christ's first coming it is called the inaugurated, realised or present kingdom, all the time expanding to include people from all the nations and transforming them all (Matthew 13:31-33)

until Christ's second coming (chapter 20). In its future perfect phase after Christ's second coming it is called the new heaven and the new earth, which lasts forever and ever (chapter 21-22).

#### **b. The city of Jerusalem is a symbol for the community of God's saved people**

The teaching in the book of Revelation is not about *a literal city*, but about the New Jerusalem, which is a figure of speech or symbol of the bride of the Lamb. The bride of the Lamb is also a figure of speech or symbol of *the community of God's saved people* from the Old Testament and the New Testament periods. The relationship between God and the city is expressed in terms of God's covenant relationship with his Old Testament people (Genesis 17:7) and his New Testament people (2 Corinthians 6:16): "They will be his people and he will be their God" (21:3).

#### **c. Revelation chapters 21 and 22 describe the ideal for the present age and the reality for the coming age**

Revelation chapter 21:1 to 22:5 is a picture of the redeemed and transformed universe *after* Christ's second coming (19:11-16) as foreshadowed by the redeemed Church *before* Christ's second coming.

The symbols in Revelation chapter 21:1 to 22:5 are on the one hand *the ideal reality* of the Church (the kingdom) in the present age *before* Christ's second coming and on the other hand *the perfect reality* of the Church (the kingdom) in the future age after Christ's second coming.

The New Jerusalem is forever the opponent of Babylon, which is a symbol for the godless, wicked and antichristian kingdom of the world and its culture. The bride is forever the opponent of the prostitute.

### **4 THE BACKGROUND**

#### **a. Past, present and future history of salvation**

Jesus Christ reveals to John *the future perfect reality* after Christ's second coming: The new heaven (the renewed universe) and the new earth (the renewed earth) have come. Christ has completed making everything new. Christ as the Alpha and the Omega has done everything that was planned. All unbelievers and the wicked have been excluded from the New Jerusalem. Christ has wiped every tear away, abolished pain and conquered death. The marriage of the Lamb with the bride has begun. God in Christ now dwells with man on the new earth. Christians see the face of God in Christ, serve him and reign with him.

But Jesus Christ reveals this future perfect reality in terms of *the past history of salvation*: the paradise with its river of life and tree of life that was lost, and the old city of Jerusalem with its foundations, walls and gates, its old temple and the Gentile nations. He speaks of the people of the past: the twelve tribes of Israel during the Old Testament period and the twelve apostles at the beginning of the New Testament period. And he speaks of the events of the past: the shining of the light of the sun and the moon, the enmity of the Gentile nations symbolised by the raging sea, the tears, death, mourning and crying and the need to shut the gates of the city. He contrasts these people and events of the past history of salvation with the perfect reality that is coming.

He also speaks of *the present history of salvation*. Note the use of the present continuous tense in Revelation 21:1 to 22:5: The New Jerusalem is continuously coming down (21:2). Christ is continuously making everything new (21:5). He urges Christians to continuously persevere in overcoming (21:7). Christ is now the Light that shines continuously (21:23). The Gentile nations are continuously bringing their splendour into the New Jerusalem (21:24,26). The river of the water of life is continuously flowing from God's throne (22:1). The trees of life are continuously yielding fruit and the leaves of the trees of life are continuously healing the nations (22:2). Christ makes the future perfect reality to be the ideal for the present reality!

## **b. The shadows of the Old Testament and the realities of the New Testament**<sup>1</sup>

In the Old Testament revelation, the city Jerusalem, the temple and the ceremonial laws were a shadow of the things that were to come. The reality, however, is found in Christ (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1).

### Jerusalem as shadow and reality (21:2).

John remembers the old Jerusalem and the believers shouting, “Lift up your gates and ancient doors that the King of glory may come in!” (Psalm 24:7).

What is coming is the real Jerusalem. The Heavenly Jerusalem is coming down onto the new earth as the New Jerusalem. In this New Jerusalem everything will be different and will be renewed, greater and more glorious. The New Jerusalem will no longer be a fortress of stone, but a beautiful decorated bride (21:9-10). Its symbolic walls will no longer press people into a small place, but will give rest and safety. “Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it. And I myself will be a wall of fire around it, declares the Lord, and I will be its glory within” (Zechariah 4-5). Its symbolic gates will never again be closed to prevent enemies from entering or its people from escaping from God, but will stand open day and night (21:25). There will be no more enemies and no one will desire to flee from God.

### The temple as shadow and reality (21:22).

John remembers the old temple building standing far away on Mount Zion and believers from all countries longing to go there, “My soul thirsts for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” (Psalm 42:2).

At Christ’s first coming that old temple was destroyed and the new temple was erected in three days. The new temple begins with Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection (John 2:19-22; Matthew 27:51; Acts 7:28-29; 17:24-25). The shadow consisting of the Old Testament temple and its ceremonial laws had passed away and the reality consisting of the New Testament temple, the Body of Christ, had come (2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21-22; 1 Peter 2:4-5). Throughout the past centuries the Body of Christ as the New Testament temple had grown and enclosed more and more believers from every nation. Finally the complete Body of Christ as the New Testament temple will consist of all the genuine believers from the Old Testament period and the New Testament period (21:12-14) and descend onto the new earth as the New Jerusalem. On the one hand, the Body of Christ will be the temple of God in which God lives by his Spirit (Ephesians 3:22). And on the other hand, God and the Lamb will be the temple enclosing all believers (21:22; cf. Isaiah 8:14a).

### The sun as shadow and reality (21:23-24).

John remembers when Jesus and his disciples sat on the Mount of Olives overlooking the old city of Jerusalem. They saw the sun set over the city and saw the city slowly disappear in the darkness. At Christ’s second coming the sun, moon and stars will be darkened (Matthew 24:29). What is coming is the real Sun, the Light of the world (John 8:12). God and the Lamb will be the Light and they will forever enlighten everyone and everything.

### The nations as shadow and reality (21:24,26).

John remembers the Gentile nations that throughout the Old Testament history attacked the old Jerusalem, plundered it and carried all its old treasures away. The Gentile nations had erected their detestable idols and altars in the old Jerusalem in order to seduce the believers. During the Old Testament period the nations were often the symbol of all the unbelievers.

What is coming is the reverse of that. The nations will only consist of all its believers, of all whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life. And they will bring all their glory and honour into the New Jerusalem. They will lay whatever is the most beautiful and honourable they have accomplished (14:13) at the feet of God from Whom, through Whom and to Whom are all things (Romans 11:36). And nothing impure will ever enter the New Jerusalem, nor anyone who does what is shameful and deceitful (Revelation 21:27).

### The Paradise as shadow and reality (22:1-3).

John remembers the old Paradise in Genesis with its trees and rivers of water, its freedom to enjoy the bounty of what God created, until Satan and his lies entered and brought the curse. God chased the man and the woman out of Paradise and an angel with a flaming sword prevented them from entering. Outside Paradise man worked hard and tried to find peace and joy, but he remained unsatisfied, poor and empty on

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<sup>1</sup> cf. Bavinck pp. 290-297

the inside. He was a restless pilgrim, driven along a way he knew not where it led to. Man no longer understood where he came from, who he was, why he was here, and where he was going.

At Christ's first coming that curse was broken (22:3; cf. Galatians 3:10,13). Christ was struck by that flaming sword and died on the cross as an atonement sacrifice for our sins. He was resurrected from the dead and took all those who believe in him along in his triumph.

It is the reality of the fall of man into sin and the reality of Christ's atonement of man's sin that lies as a hidden secret behind the history of the world. Every phenomenon in the history of this world must be viewed from the point of view of this coming reality.

The new earth that is coming is much more than the old Paradise. The New Jerusalem is much more than the old Jerusalem. Just as the old spring of Siloam originated from the temple mount and Ezekiel saw a river flowing from under the stone temple, likewise John saw the river of life originating from under the throne of God and the Lamb (22:1).

The history of the world has not just been a bad dream. The terrible things in history have all happened, but also the history of God's salvation in the Lamb has happened! The Lamb really died and was really resurrected. The threat and the terror are gone. The Lamb is no longer the Sacrifice, but the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the visible image of the invisible God sitting on the throne (22:1; Colossians 1:15,19). And he is the source of eternal life (John 17:3).

It is in the vision of the New Jerusalem on the new earth that *all the things in earlier history (the imperfect representations or shadows of the coming reality) receive their full significance and become what they are in reality*: The old Paradise with its trees and rivers of water and the old Jerusalem with its foundations, walls and gates have only been a foreshadowing of the reality that comes! The new earth is the real Paradise with its real river of life and real tree of life. The new earth is the real Canaan flowing with milk and honey, the real land God had promised throughout history. What God's people inherit is not just one country (cf. Genesis 15:18), but the whole renewed world (Romans 4:13)! On the new earth will be the real Jerusalem, the real temple. The old Jerusalem with its old temple was only an imperfect representation of the coming reality. In the New Jerusalem all words and actions, all music and creativity, all thinking and all life is taken up in harmony with the final kingdom of God, because here God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).

All the above things have served as signs for the Church throughout her long and arduous pilgrim's journey through the history of this present world. They are shadows, symbols, passing expressions of the realities that are coming. Every word and work will only find its eternal rest (Sabbath, Hebrews 4:9-10) and eternal peace in the reality that is coming. Then all former tears will be wiped away and all former imperfections will be made perfect. Right now God in Christ sitting on the throne is in the process of making everything new (Revelation 21:4-5; cf. John 5:17)!

### **c. Zion (Jerusalem) after the exile, after Christ's first coming and after Christ's second coming**

Due to the prophetic perspective of the Old Testament prophets (cf. 1 Peter 1:9-12), they could not clearly distinguish between Zion as the restored people of God after the exile and Zion as the spiritual people of God, especially in her eternal state.

#### Zion as the restored physical Jerusalem after the exile or as God's spiritual people.

The Old Testament prophecies were proclamations to the Old Testament believers in exile in Babylon (586 B.C.) that the Old Testament theocracy with Jerusalem as centre *still had a glorious future*.

The captives and prisoners in exile would be set free (Isaiah 61:1). They would no longer be called a deserted and desolate woman, but a married woman, a bride (Isaiah 62:4-5; cf. Revelation 21:9). They would return on the highway to God's Zion (Isaiah 19:23-25; 35:8-10; 40:3; 62:10-12). Aliens would rebuild Jerusalem's walls, shepherd their flocks, work their fields and vineyards, and their kings would serve them, while they would be priests and ministers of God (Isaiah 60:10; 61:4-6).

Fulfilment. King Cyrus of the Medo-Persian Empire ordered the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the release of the Babylonian captives (538 B.C.) (Ezra 1:1-4). The temple was rebuilt in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:15) and the wall

of Jerusalem in 432 B.C. (Nehemiah 5:14; 6:15). And many aliens (Gentiles) joined Israel. In the future God would gather still others (Christians from every nation) to his people (Isaiah 56:1-8)!

#### Zion as God's spiritual Jerusalem after Christ's first coming.

The Old Testament prophecies were proclamations to the Old Testament believers in exile in Babylon that the Old Testament theocracy *would be continued and extended to include* all the other nations in the world in the New Testament Church. Note: Israel would *not be displaced* by the Church, but Israel would *continue on a higher level and will be enlarged to include* the believers of all other nations! The Heavenly Jerusalem would be the beginning and pledge (guarantee, security) of the future and final glory of the New Testament Church as expressed in the New Jerusalem on the new earth!

A new era (period of time) was coming, which would find her fulfilment, not in the prosperity of the earthly Jerusalem after the exile, but in the Heavenly Jerusalem as expressed in the New Testament Church (after Christ's first coming).

The prophecy about the aliens above is an Old Testament presentation of the New Testament truth that "salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22; Romans 9:4-5)!

Fulfilment. The prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-2 was fulfilled in Christ's first coming (Luke 4:18-19). Salvation began with the Jews (John 4:22), but was continued and extended to the salvation of believers in the other nations (Isaiah 49:6; Acts 13:47-48; Matthew 28:19; Romans 1:16-17; 10:12-13). The Heavenly Jerusalem had many citizens in heaven and many citizens still on earth (Galatians 4:26-27; Hebrews 12:22-24).

#### Zion as God's spiritual Jerusalem after Christ's second coming.

The Old Testament prophecies were proclamations to the Old Testament believers in exile in Babylon that the Old Testament theocracy *would finally be fulfilled in the New Jerusalem on the new earth!* Zion is a symbol of the future reality that surpasses the reality on the present earth.

Several elements of the descriptions of Zion or Jerusalem in the Old Testament are *figurative descriptions of real future realities*. If these descriptions would be taken *literally*, they would form absurdities. For example, the literal Mount Zion would be too small for all God's people to dwell on it (Isaiah 11:9) and the temple rebuilt with wood would afterwards be replaced with bronze and again replaced with gold (Isaiah 60:13,17).

Several elements of the descriptions of Zion or Jerusalem in the Old Testament *surpass the reality on the present earth*: the absence of war (Isaiah 2:4), the absence of violence among animals and all people having knowledge of God (Isaiah 11:4b-10), the city built with precious stones (Isaiah 54:11-12) and the glory of God as the everlasting light that would make the light of the sun and moon obsolete (Isaiah 60:1,19).

#### **d. Explanation of the Old Testament prophecies about Zion**

*Zion is a symbol representing first the restored earthly city of Jerusalem and her people after the exile and secondly the Heavenly Jerusalem (before Christ's second coming) as the beginning and pledge of the New Jerusalem (after Christ's second coming).*

#### **Isaiah 2:2-4.**

Zion (Jerusalem) is a symbol representing the centre of God's worldwide kingdom over all the nations, the spiritual centre of all the nations, from where God's revelation (law, justice, righteousness, salvation)(Isaiah 51:4-5) and good news (Isaiah 61:1) would spread to all the nations on earth. Fulfilment: Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8.

Isaiah 2:2-4 is a prophecy of the Heavenly Jerusalem as beginning and pledge of the New Jerusalem. It is a prophecy about the establishment of the kingdom at Christ's first coming (Luke 2:30-31; 24:47; Acts 1:8) and its growth until its culmination at Christ's second coming (2 Peter 3:13).

In contrast to the Jerusalem of Isaiah's time that was filled with war and destruction, the future Jerusalem (Isaiah's future, not our future) would be the centre of God's world-wide kingdom over all the nations. "The last days" stretches from Christ's first coming (Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:1) to Christ's second coming (2 Timothy 3:1; 2 Peter 3:3). "In the last days", Mount Zion (Jerusalem) would receive this most honoured

position. Although people regard other mountains as far more glorious, Zion would be most glorious, because God dwells there (Psalm 68:16; 125:1-2). Zion would be “raised above the hills” does not mean that Mount Zion would literally be the highest physical mountain on earth, but that Zion (the symbol of the Christian Church, Hebrews 12:22) would symbolically become the centre of the world. People of the nations would be drawn to Zion and stream to Zion and request the teaching of God’s ways and words. As a result, war between the nations would cease and the final phase of God’s kingdom would commence.

### **Isaiah 11:6-10.**

This is a prophecy about Mount Zion stretched out over the new earth after Christ’s second coming. Zion is a symbol representing *the dwelling place of God’s people on the new earth.*

After Christ’s first coming (Isaiah 11:1-4a) and second coming (Isaiah 11:4b-5) *new conditions would arise on the new earth*: the former wild animals would no longer be violent; Mount Zion would then stretch itself out over the whole new earth; and all God’s people dwelling on Mount Zion would know and fellowship with God (Isaiah 65:17-25).

Isaiah chapter 10 speaks of the humiliation of the kingdom of the world (symbolised by Assyria) and Isaiah chapter 11 speaks of the exaltation of the kingdom of God (symbolised by Zion), and the exaltation of someone of the house of David, who surpasses the human limits to such an extent that he could only be the Messiah!

The kingdom of God before Christ’s second coming (Isaiah 11:1-5,10). After the felling of the great forest of trees of Lebanon (a symbol of the kingdom of the world) (Isaiah 10:33-34), a shoot or branch (a symbol of the Messiah) would arise from one tree trunk (a symbol of the house of Judah). The Holy Spirit would permanently rest on him. He would function as the Prophet and the King-Judge (Isaiah 61:1-2; cf. Revelation 1:5; 2:12; 3:14). The Messiah would be exalted as a banner above all people, drawing people from all nations to himself (cf. John 12:31-32). The people of the Messiah would submit themselves to his Spirit filled counsel and the teaching of his ways and words (Isaiah 2:3).

The kingdom of God at Christ’s second coming (Isaiah 11:6-10). Finally the Messiah would strike the wicked kingdom of the world and its antichrist with the breath of his mouth (Isaiah 11:4b; cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:8). Violence in the world of animals and oppression in the world of people would have come to an end. This is a symbolic description of the conditions on the new earth (Isaiah 2:4; 9:6; Romans 8:19-20). Verse 9 *cannot be literal*, because Mount Zion as the dwelling place of God’s people would literally be too small. Mount Zion (a symbol of the people of God) would then stretch itself out over the whole new earth! Every one of the sanctified people of God would know God personally and intimately (Jeremiah 31:34). The final place where the Messiah will come to rest (Isaiah 11:10) of his work of judgement and salvation (cf. John 5:17) will be glorious due to all the wealth of the nations that is brought into it (cf. Revelation 21:24).

### **Isaiah 24:19-23.**

This is a prophecy about the binding of the evil powers and their release after many days, the final destruction of this present earth and the reign of God on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem.

Zion is a symbol representing the centre of God’s worldwide kingdom over all the nations. God would finally judge and devastate this present rebellious earth so that it will never rise again (Isaiah 24:19-20; cf. Revelation 20:11). But he would do this in two stages:

The kingdom of God before Christ’s second coming (Isaiah 24:21-22a). First, he would bind the evil powers (demons in the sky and kings on the earth) and shut them up in a dungeon (at Christ’s first coming) (cf. Revelation 20:1-3).

The kingdom of God at Christ’s second coming (Isaiah 24:22b-23). And “after many days” he would finally release (Hebrew) or punish (NIV) these evil powers (cf. Revelation 20:7-10). Then the sun and moon would stop giving light (cf. Isaiah 13:9-11; Joel 2:31; Revelation 20:11) and God would reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before its elders (the representatives of God’s people) gloriously (cf. Revelation 22:3-5).

### **Isaiah 25:6-9.**

This is a prophecy about the banquet at the wedding of the Lamb.

The picture of Isaiah 24:23 is continued. On this mountain (Zion) God would prepare the final banquet (cf. Matthew 8:11; 22:4; Revelation 19:9), the wedding supper of the Lamb. There he would take away the shroud of mourning due to all suffering on earth, swallow up death forever, wipe away the tears from all faces and remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:54; Revelation 21:4)!

### **Isaiah 49:14-15; 51:3; 52:1.**

Isaiah 52:1 is a prophecy about Jerusalem clothing herself like a bride. The defiled will never enter her again.

Zion cannot always be taken *literally* (as *the physical mountain in Israel*)! Zion is sometimes a symbol representing *the people of God in Israel* (Isaiah 49:14-15), who complain that God had forsaken them. Zion is sometimes a symbol representing *the land of Israel* (Isaiah 51:3) with its ruins, deserts and wastelands. And Zion is sometimes a symbol of *the city of Jerusalem* (Isaiah 52:1), *the Palestinian Jerusalem, pictured in terms of her final glory, the New Jerusalem*. In contrast to Babylon that would be laid in the dust and remain naked (Isaiah 47:1-3), Jerusalem, the holy city, would clothe herself with garments of splendour as a bride (Isaiah 61:10; cf. Revelation 21:2). The uncircumcised and defiled (the Babylonians) would not enter her again (Isaiah 52:1; cf. Revelation 21:27).

### **Isaiah 54:1-17.**

*Zion is a symbol representing first the restored city of Jerusalem and her people after the exile and secondly the Heavenly Jerusalem before Christ's second coming as the beginning and pledge of the New Jerusalem after Christ's second coming.*

#### Zion after the exile.

Isaiah 54:1-8. The barren and desolate woman (Isaiah 54:1), the widow (Isaiah 54:4), the deserted wife (Isaiah 54:6), will again have her Maker as husband (Isaiah 54:5) and as redeemer (Isaiah 54:8). The returning exiles will dispossess the nations dwelling in the land and settle in their cities (Isaiah 54:2-3).

#### Zion after Christ's first coming.

Isaiah 54:9-10. God's unfailing love for his people will not be shaken and his covenant of peace with them would not be removed (Genesis 17:4-8).

Isaiah 54:11-12. The afflicted *city, its foundations, battlements, gates and walls will be built with precious stones* (Revelation 21:18-21). This description surpasses the earthly literal Jerusalem! Specific meaning given to each of these precious stones is based on speculation and not on any evidence in the Bible.

Isaiah 54:13-14a. All her citizens will be taught by God (Jeremiah 31:34). This description surpasses the earthly literal Jerusalem! This situation concerning the people of God began in principle at Christ's first coming (John 6:45-48; 1 Corinthians 2:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 John 2:20,27) and will be fulfilled in complete and perfect reality at Christ's second coming (1 Corinthians 13:12; 1 John 3:2). All her citizens will experience great peace and righteousness. Peace is perfect well-being, all necessary good, all spiritual prosperity; and freedom from fears, agitating passions and moral conflicts (Romans 5:1; Galatians 5:22). On the new earth, peace will include the absence of violence, oppression and war, etc. Righteousness is to be regarded and treated by God as standing in a perfect right relationship to him. It is also the fruit of this relationship, namely, to do whatever is right in God's eyes. Complete and perfect righteousness will only be realised on the new earth (2 Peter 3:13).

Isaiah 54:14b-17. The Heavenly Jerusalem (the people of God) will not have to experience tyranny and terror as people without God do. Even when she is still attacked by enemies, God's people must know that this is not God's doing – that he did not send these attackers as he sent the Assyrians and Babylonians against Israel in the past (Isaiah 10:5-6; Jeremiah 27:2-15). God made the blacksmith, who makes weapons of war. He created the destroyer to work havoc only in order to fulfil his eternal plan (Psalm 33:13-19; Isaiah 37:26-29).

Therefore the outcome of every attack is in God's hands and no weapon against God's people can or will prevail. All arguments of their accusers will be refuted (Ezra 4:7-24; Revelation 12:10). All the above will be the inheritance of the servants of the Lord, the individual citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem. This vindication or righteousness consists of the salvation God will bring to Zion (Isaiah 46:13).

### **Isaiah 60:1-22.**

*Zion is a symbol representing first the restored city of Jerusalem and her people after the exile and secondly the Heavenly Jerusalem as the beginning and pledge of the New Jerusalem. Zion is the city of the Lord (Isaiah 60:14; cf. Hebrews 12:22). The Lord Jesus Christ revealed the New Jerusalem in terms of Old Testament prophecy in Isaiah chapter 60.*

Isaiah 60:1-3. Zion (Jerusalem) is pictured as a woman ("arise, shine and your light" all use the feminine forms)(Isaiah 49:18; 50:1). The divine command 'shine' causes something to exist that did not exist before (Genesis 1:3), but refers here to receiving salvation and joy. The words 'your light' refers to the salvation destined for her and consists of the glory of God, the revelation of God's divine characteristics and gracious presence (Isaiah 4:5; 24:23; 60:19). This is contrasted with the thick darkness that still covered the people of the earth. The prophecy says that the nations and their kings would be drawn to this light, indicating that God's Old Testament people did not receive this light of salvation only for themselves (Isaiah 2:2-4; 43:10-12; cf. Hebrews 11:39-40; 1 Peter 1:9-12)!

Isaiah 60:4-7. The prophecy says that Zion would see the nations bringing the still wandering and exiled Jews (Isaiah 49:22) and the wealth from distant lands into her. The wealth or riches would come from the interior, Midian (north Arabia), Sheba (south Arabia), and Nebaiot and Kedar are two of the twelve tribal leaders of the Ishmailite tribes (Genesis 25:13). It will consist of flocks (Ezekiel 27:21) that would serve as sacrifices in the temple.

Isaiah 60:8-9. The wealth would also come from overseas, brought from the islands (the West) by Tarshish ships (a symbol for the great seafaring ships) that are pictured as flying clouds or doves. They would bring people and wealth, not to the land of Israel, but to the Holy One of Israel and for his honour. Fulfilment: Revelation 21:24-26.

Isaiah 60:10-12. The prophecy says that the people from these foreign nations would rebuild the walls of Zion (Isaiah 61:5; 60:16) and their kings would serve Zion. The gates of Zion would always stand open, they would never be shut, day or night, because she would have nothing to fear and would need to let a constant stream of people and wealth enter her. Fulfilment: Matthew 28:19 and Revelation 21:25. The nations and kings that would not want to serve Zion would be utterly destroyed. Fulfilment: 1 Corinthians 15:24-25.

Isaiah 60:13-16. The prophecy says that the beautiful wood of the Lebanon would be used to rebuild the temple, which served only as God's footstool (1 Chronicles 28:2), because in reality God lives in heaven. The descendents of her former oppressors (Isaiah 19:23-25) would bow down before Zion (Isaiah 49:23). This is a figurative expression of showing the highest honour. Fulfilment: Revelation 3:9. The former abusive names (Isaiah 62:4) would be turned into honouring names (Isaiah 62:12). Fulfilment: instead of being desolate and deserted, Jerusalem will be the dwelling place of God, the Bride of the Lamb, the Holy city, Revelation 21:3,9-10.

Isaiah 60:17-18. The prophecy says that God would make Zion glorious, but not in a literal sense (verse 13). A literal interpretation would cause verse 17 to contradict verse 13. God would use the best for his highest purpose: bronze in place of wood and gold in place of bronze. In allegorical sense, peace and righteousness would be Zion's rulers. Under such a regime there would no longer be violence, ruin or destruction (cf. Isaiah 2:2-4)! Fulfilment: 2 Peter 3:13.

Isaiah 60:19-20. The prophecy does not say that the sun and moon would no longer exist, but rather that due to the light of the glory of God they would no longer have any use. The picture of a city illuminated by divine light (Isaiah 4:5; 24:23) rises above the reality on this present earth. Isaiah transfers us to the new earth (Isaiah 65:17-25), where the sun and moon have no function anymore. This outward light is also a picture of the salvation and joy she would enjoy: her days of sorrows would be ended (Isaiah 40:1). Fulfilment: Revelation 21:23; 22:5.

Isaiah 60:21-22. The prophecy is a picture of her people more than the city itself. All her people, that is, all the people of Judah would be righteous. Fulfilment: Revelation 21:27; 22:11. They would possess the land (the new earth) forever; it would never again be given over to their enemies. Because the righteous will possess the land *forever*, Isaiah chapter 60 cannot refer to a future limited so-called 1000 year kingdom. The prophecy refers to the eternal kingdom (cf. 2 Peter 1:11); to the kingdom that cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:28). The righteous people would be a shoot, cut off and again planted. They would be God's planting (Isaiah 61:3; cf. Psalm 92:12-14; Matthew 15:13; 1 Corinthians 3:9). They would be the work of God's hands in order to display his splendour. Whatever God has planted, would certainly grow! Even the least of God's people (Judges 6:15; Micah 4:7; 5:2) would become a thousand and the smallest a mighty nation (Isaiah 60:22; cf. Genesis 12:2; Galatians 3:26-29). Fulfilment: Revelation 7:9.

### **Isaiah 62:1-5,11-12.**

*Zion is a symbol first of the restored city of Jerusalem and secondly of the heavenly Jerusalem as the beginning and pledge of the New Jerusalem.*

The prophecy says that the people of Zion or Jerusalem would be called by a new name that God himself would bestow (Isaiah 62:2; cf. Revelation 2:17; 3:12). Zion would be called married. Just as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so God would rejoice over Zion (Isaiah 62:4-5; cf. Revelation 21:9-10). The Lord made a proclamation to the ends of the earth, "Zion, your Saviour comes! His reward is with him and his recompense accompanies him!" (Isaiah 62:11; cf. Revelation 22:12). The people of Zion would be called "the holy people of the Lord" (Isaiah 62:12; cf. 1 Peter 2:9). Fulfilment: Revelation 22:11.

### **e. Explanation of the Old Testament prophecies about God's coming to save and to judge**

Due to the prophetic perspective of the Old Testament prophets, they could not clearly distinguish between God's initial coming to save at the end of the exile period and his final coming to judge the oppressing nations.

*At his initial coming (at Christ's first coming) God would judge the oppressing nations and save his Old Testament people, the believers in Israel. But at his final coming (at Christ's second coming) God would judge the oppressing nations and save his New Testament people, the believers in the Church coming from all nations.*

### **Isaiah 2:2-4.**

After Christ's first coming God's revelation would spread from Zion (Jerusalem) to all the nations. Fulfilment: Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8. At Christ's second coming the nations would beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

### **Isaiah 51:4-6.**

After Christ's first coming God's revelation consisting of God' law, justice, righteousness and salvation would go out from God to all the nations. At Christ's second coming the present heavens will vanish like smoke and the present earth will wear out like a garment.

### **Isaiah 59:12-21.**

Isaiah 59:12-15a. The prayer of confession of God's people is heard. God sees the lack of justice, the lies, the treachery, the rebellion and oppression, to which unbelievers in Israel were also guilty. Up to then the believers in Israel had hoped for God's intervention in vain.

Isaiah 59:15b-19. But no nation and no individual intervened. Therefore God himself would intervene and act to do righteousness and to bring salvation. His armour would consist of righteousness (judging the enemies justly), salvation (saving his people, imparting his Spirit and his words), vengeance (punishing his enemies with what they deserve) and zeal (moving the love and wrath in his spirit heftily). His coming unto judgement would fill people in the whole world with fear and reverence.

Isaiah 59:20-21. God would come to his enemies to repay them with his wrath (Isaiah 59:18-19), but he would come to his people Zion to redeem them (Isaiah 59:20). Thus, at Christ's first coming, the day of God's judgement for some would also be the day of God's salvation for others (Isaiah 59:18-20; cf. Matthew 21:43-44; Lucas 2:34; John 3:18,36).

God's people are called Zion. But Zion is no longer physical Israel, but spiritual Israel, those people in Jacob who repent of their sins. Those in Israel who do not repent, do not belong to spiritual Israel (John 5:39-40; Romans 9:6). God would renew his ancient covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:4-8; cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16). The contents of the covenant would consist of God's people possessing God's Spirit and God's Words in every generation. Fulfilment: Isaiah was referring to the Zion after Christ's first coming and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-39).

### **Isaiah 61:1-2.**

God's Spirit would be on God's anointed and he would preach the good news to the poor, bind up the broken-hearted, proclaim freedom to the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, proclaim the year of God's favour and the day of vengeance of God. The words 'day' and 'year' are not intended to be taken literal, because in Isaiah 34:8 they are synonyms.

Fulfilment: First this prophecy is fulfilled in the remnant that returned from exile in Babylon (cf. verse 4-6). The anointed person refers to the prophet Isaiah who proclaimed God's message. The good news is about the deliverance from slavery in Babylon. The poor or humble are those who kept hoping amidst their suffering. The broken-hearted are those overcome by their suffering. The captives and prisoners in darkness are the exiled remnant in Babylon.

But this prophecy finds its higher and complete fulfilment only at Christ's first coming. The anointed person is Christ. The good news is the gospel about redemption from the slavery of sin. The poor are those who admit that they are completely dependent on Christ. The broken-hearted are those overwhelmed by their sins. The captives or prisoners in darkness are the lost people in every nation. Thus Isaiah was primarily referring to Zion after Christ's first coming (Luke 4:18-19; cf. Matthew 5:3-10).

### **Isaiah 63:1-6.**

The day of God's vengeance against his enemies will also be the day of redemption of his people. Here the word 'day' and 'year' refer to the same time, namely, Christ's second coming (Isaiah 63:4; cf. Isaiah 59:18-20).

God would come to judge the nations, which are a symbol representing the enemies of God's people, but he would also come to redeem Zion, which is a symbol representing his people from every nation. Isaiah describes this event as if it has already taken place in order to indicate the absolute certainty of this event. The One coming to judge and to save is robed in splendour and strides forward in great power. This marks him as the great Conqueror. He introduces himself as the One who speaks and acts according to his words: he speaks righteousness and is mighty to save. He will tread the winepress, which is a symbol of the final judgement (Isaiah 63:1,3,6; Joel 3:13). His garments are stained crimson by the blood of his enemies. The day of vengeance and year of redemption had come, but no nation and no individual helped. Therefore God would work salvation (for his people) and execute judgement (against his enemies) in his own power. He would trample the nations and make them drunk with his wrath, so that they would become helpless (cf. Isaiah 51:21). Fulfilment: At his second coming Jesus Christ will conquer his enemies in the final battle and symbolically tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God, that is, he will execute the punishment at the final judgement (Revelation 19:11-16).

### **Isaiah 66:15-21.**

After the exile to Babylon, but before Christ's first coming, the Lord would come with fire and he would execute judgement upon all men (Isaiah 66:15-16). Many would be slain (Isaiah 66:16). God was about to gather all the nations and tongues (languages) in order to judge them (Isaiah 66:18). This would include the unbelievers and the wicked people in Israel. Fulfilment: God's judgement of the nations came by means of the destruction brought by the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greek-Syrian Empire and the Roman Empire

before Christ's first coming. This coming judgement would be followed by the coming salvation at Christ's first coming.

After Christ's first coming, some of the survivors of God's judgement by means of the great empires (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece-Syria, Rome) would be sent to the Gentile nations to proclaim God's glory among them (Isaiah 66:19). And they would bring all the (elect) brothers of the Jews and Gentiles from all the nations to Zion in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord (Isaiah 66:20). God would select some of them to be his priests, that is, his ministers. Fulfilment: The (Jewish) apostles and others proclaimed the gospel to the nations (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8). This caused many Jews and Gentiles to become believers in Jesus Christ (Isaiah 66:20; cf. Romans 11:4-5,11-26). God selected some of them to be his priests, that is, his ministers (Isaiah 66:21; cf. 1 Peter 2:5,9; Revelation 1:6).

#### **f. God's new heaven and new earth are described in figurative terms**

Due to the prophetic perspective of the Old Testament prophets, they could not clearly distinguish between conditions in the old Jerusalem after the return from exile and the conditions in the New Jerusalem after Christ's second coming.

#### **Isaiah 51:6.**

*The present heavens and earth would vanish*, but God's salvation would last forever and his righteousness would never fail (Isaiah 51:6; cf. Revelation 20:11).

#### **Isaiah 65:17-25.**

Isaiah 65:17-19. God would create *a new heavens and a new earth* (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; cf. Revelation 21:1; 2 Peter 3:13). Nevertheless, the description of the new heavens and new earth is still done in terms of *the blessed land of Israel*.

The former troubles in the land (Isaiah 65:16) would not be remembered nor would they come to mind. God would create *Jerusalem* to be a delight and its people a joy. He would take delight in his people (believers from both the Jews and the Gentiles). The sound of weeping and crying would no more be heard (Isaiah 65:18-19; cf. Revelation 7:17; 21:4).

Isaiah 65:20-24. Nevertheless, as a typical Old Testament prophet, Isaiah's prophetic perspective does not allow him to distinguish in Isaiah 65:20-24 clearly between the conditions in Jerusalem after the return from exile and the conditions in the New Jerusalem after Christ's second coming. The prophecy says that early deaths would no longer occur and everyone would become very old. These are but earthly glimpses of the eternal state on the new earth (Isaiah 25:8). Long life in the land would be accompanied by enjoyment of the land. They would live in their houses and eat their own produce, because there would be no enemies to rob them and they would live as long as the trees they plant. They would not toil in vain, because the enemy would not rob them of the fruit of their labour. They would not bear children to be killed by the enemy. They would be a people blessed by the Lord and see their children for many generations. Their prayers would be answered (Isaiah 30:19).

Isaiah 65:25. The conditions on the new earth are described in terms of Isaiah 11:6-9. The former wild animals would live together with the former tame animals. Because the knowledge of the Lord fills the earth (Isaiah 11:9), its people would neither harm nor destroy on all God's holy mountain (Zion = New Jerusalem = the community of God's people on the new earth) (Isaiah 2:4; 11:9; 65:25). New is the description of the serpent, which would have dust as his food. This is an allusion to Genesis 3:14. The serpent would be limited (curbed, curtailed) to the curse pronounced over it, without harming people.

#### **Isaiah 66:1-2.**

Because heaven is God's throne and earth his footstool, there is no need to build an earthly house or temple for God. Therefore during the New Testament period the earthly temple is abolished (Matthew 27:51; Acts 7:48-50; 17:24-25). As a result of the world-wide proclamation of God's glory (Isaiah 66:19), all mankind in

the new heavens and new earth would bow down before the Lord (Isaiah 66:22-23; cf. Revelation 15:4). In the New Jerusalem there would be no temple (Revelation 21:22).

### g. Isaiah chapters 11 and 65 describe the new earth

Do Isaiah chapters 11 and 65 describe a so-called millennial kingdom on the old earth? Or do they describe the new earth?

#### Isaiah 11:6-9.

Isaiah 11:6-9 is generally regarded by futurists (historic premillennialists and dispensational premillennialists) as picturing the future earthly Jewish millennial kingdom. Scofield says, "This chapter is a prophetic picture of the glory of the future kingdom, which will be set up when David's Son returns in glory." Walvoord says, "Isaiah 11 paints the graphic picture of the reign of Christ on earth, a scene which cannot be confused with the present age, the intermediate state, or the eternal state if interpreted in any normal literal sense. As presented it describes the millennial earth ... It describes animals such as wolves, lambs, leopards, kids, calves, young lions, all of which are creatures of earth and *not of heaven*, and further pictures them in a time of tranquillity such as only can apply to the millennial earth."<sup>2</sup>

However, this passage can be interpreted differently! The Bible predicts a new heaven and *a new earth* (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; Revelation 21:1) and the details of Isaiah 11:6-9 describes the conditions, not of the millennial earth, but of *the new earth after* Christ's second coming (Isaiah 11:4b-5)!

#### Isaiah 65:17-25.

The futurist view regards this as a mixture of the millennial state and the eternal state. Scofield understands verse 17 as the eternal state, but verse 18-25 as millennial conditions. Walvoord understands verse 17-19 as describing the eternal state, while verse 20-25 describes conditions during the millennium. Because both these authors put the description of the millennial state *after* the description of the eternal state, they both *depart from their literalistic chronological method of interpretation!* Moreover, they differ from one another.

People who believe in a millennial kingdom might find the millennial kingdom described here, but people who do not believe in an earthly millennial kingdom will certainly not be compelled to accept it by reading these verses.

Nevertheless, there is a serious exegetical obstacle for futurists: In the passage Isaiah 65:17-25, verse 17 speaks unambiguously about *the new heavens and new earth* (and not about a millennial kingdom)! Revelation 21:1 marks the coming of the new heaven and the new earth as *the final and eternal state!* Isaiah 65:18 calls the reader to rejoice *forever* in the New Jerusalem that God will create (not to rejoice just for a mere 1000 years). Isaiah 65:19 says that the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more and this also describes the final and eternal state (Revelation 21:4). There is no indication that the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 65:18 (Scofield) or Isaiah 65:20 (Walvoord) is suddenly shifting from a description of the eternal kingdom to a description of the so-called millennial kingdom, which would precede that eternal kingdom! To mix the description of a so-called millennial kingdom with the description of the eternal state, as Scofield and Walvoord do, is non-literal, non-chronological and non-biblical!

As a typical Old Testament prophet, Isaiah's prophetic perspective does not allow him to distinguish in Isaiah 65:20-24 clearly between the conditions in Jerusalem after the return from exile on this present earth and the conditions in the New Jerusalem on the new earth (after Christ's second coming). The prophet Isaiah lived and prophesied in the period of shadows, but the apostle John lived and prophesied in the period of realities (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1; cf. 1 Peter 1:9-12).

In Isaiah 65:20 and Zechariah 8:4-5 the prophets speak of death after old age, but Revelation 21:4 speaks of no more death at all! Isaiah 65:21 and 61:4 speak of rebuilding the ancient ruins of Jerusalem, but Revelation 21:2 speaks of the New Jerusalem coming out of heaven! Isaiah 65:21b and Ezekiel 28:26 speak of planting vineyards, but Revelation 22:2 speaks of the trees of life! Isaiah 65:22 speaks of enjoying the work of their

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<sup>2</sup> John E. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, p. 298

hands, but Revelation 22:3-6 speaks of serving and reigning together with Christ! Isaiah 65:23 and 44:3 speak of people and their descendants that are blessed after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on them, but Revelation 21:3 speaks of people blessed by God's dwelling among them! Isaiah 65:24 and 30:19 speak of God hearing their prayers, but Revelation 22:4 speaks of seeing God with their own eyes! Isaiah 65:25 describes the animals as in Isaiah 11:9-11 and says that people "will neither harm nor destroy on all God's holy mountain". Isaiah 11:9 gives the reason as "the earth being full of the knowledge of the Lord". This is a description of the final perfection (Revelation 21:27; 22:14-15) rather than a description of the so-called millennial kingdom. According to futurist (premillennial) teaching, there would still be disobedient nations in the so-called millennial kingdom which must be ruled with a rod of iron! But Isaiah speaks of the final perfect state!