

# REVELATION CHAPTER 21

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

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 ideal Church in the present time before the second coming of Christ and also a bearing on the reality of the Church in the end-time after the second coming of Christ! Thus, this is a symbolic description of the redeemed universe beyond present history together with its bearing upon present Church history!*

### PART 1. Revelation 21:1-8. THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH.

#### **(1) The heaven and the earth (21:1a)**

**21:1** And (then) I saw (*Greek: horao, opsomai, eidon, heoraka*)(*aorist*) a new (*Greek: kainos*) heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had *once for all time* passed away (*Greek: aperchomai, eleusomai, elthon, elelutha*)(*aorist*).

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).

The second coming (*Greek: parousia*) (2 Peter 3:4) of Jesus Christ "as a thief" has come on "the day of the Lord" (*Hebrew: jom JaHWeH; Greek: hemera kuriou*) (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" (completely exposed)(2 Peter 3:10; cf. Matthew 10:26). "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! This is a great encouragement for Christians!

Question. After the second coming of Christ, will Christians live in heaven or on earth?

Before the second coming of Christ. The spirits of all believers who die physically go to heaven, which is the place where God dwells (2 Samuel 12:23; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 16:22; 2 Corinthians 5:1; Philippians 1:23; Revelation 20:4). 'Heaven' is then symbolically called 'paradise' (Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 12:3-4; Revelation 2:7).

After the second coming of Christ. The final destiny of Christians is not 'paradise'! The popular belief that paradise is a place of pleasure in heaven is not true. The final destiny of Christians is the new earth, which will be far more than paradise! The old paradise on earth was a small garden with fruit trees somewhere in the Middle East, but the new earth will be this whole completely renewed earth (Romans 4:13; 8:19-21)! In the old paradise Satan could enter, human beings could sin and they could die spiritually, physically and eternally! But the new earth will be the home of righteousness and nothing impure will ever enter it (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:27)! On the new earth there will no more be Satan, sin or death (Revelation 21:4)!

Through the final judgement day the angels of Christ will weed out his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil (Matthew 13:41). Everything and everyone sinful on earth will be exposed and destroyed by fire. The old universe and old earth will pass away and there will be a new universe and new earth (2 Peter 3:10-13).

## **(2) The sea (21:1b)**

and the sea is (*present continuous tense*) no more (*Greek: eti*). 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*<sup>1</sup>! This is a great encouragement for Christians!

Question. Why will there no longer be any sea?

Before the second coming of Christ. 'The sea' is the symbol of the evil nations that are restless and in conflict (Isaiah 8:7; 17:12). It is the picture of the evil powers of chaos that threatens life. It stands for the nations who worship the beast "out of the sea" (the antichrist, Revelation 13:1; cf. Daniel 7:2-7) and the great prostitute who sits "on many waters" (Babylon, Revelation 17:15).

After the second coming of Christ. There will no longer be any 'sea'. This symbol does not say that there will no longer be oceans of water on the new earth, but that there will no longer be any godless and anti-Christian nations or any evil and chaotic forces on the new earth! There will be no more war! Only peace!

## **(3) The city (21:2,9-10)**

**21:2** and I saw (*aorist*) the Holy City, the New Jerusalem.

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; 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 (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 3:16).

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 non-Jewish Christians 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 violently 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 Testament (Psalm 107:32) and in the New Testament (Matthew 16:18)! 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!

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<sup>1</sup> Think of the nations that produce terrorists.

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 the first coming of Christ. 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 the first coming of Christ, 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 that although she was now barren, she would become more fruitful than ever before (Isaiah 54:1-3).

At the first coming of Christ, 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 the second coming of Christ, the believers in the New Testament have no enduring city on this earth (Hebrews 13:14), 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 the second coming of Christ the present earthly city of Jerusalem is *figuratively* a picture of the old covenant people that are still living in slavery (to the law), 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, the Israel according to the flesh)(1 Corinthians 10:18) with *the present spiritual Jerusalem* (the Church, the Israel of God)(Galatians 6:16)!

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* (Galatians 6:12)! 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, the figurative Sarah, the figurative Mount Zion (14:2; Hebrews 12:22,) and the figurative 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). 'The Israel of God' has been crucified with Christ and has become a new creation (Galatians 6:12-16). 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).

Question. What does the Holy City, the New Jerusalem that comes out of heaven, represent?

Babylon and Jerusalem. While the city of Babylon is a symbol of the unbelieving and unholy people and the old order on earth (Revelation 17:1-2,5,18), the city of Jerusalem is a symbol of God's believing and holy people and the new order (Hebrews 11:9-10,13-16).

The Heavenly Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem. Both the Heavenly Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem are not a literal city, but a symbol of a literal reality, the community of all believers (the Church). After the final judgement in the air, the Heavenly Jerusalem (Christ and the Church consisting of all believers) will descend onto the new earth as the New Jerusalem (Revelation 20:11 – 21:2). And God in Christ will dwell with believers on the new earth (Revelation 21:3).

Before the second coming of Christ. All believers are especially called 'the Heavenly Jerusalem' (Galatians 4:21-31; Hebrews 12:22-24; 13:14). Already during the Old Testament period they are symbolically called 'the bride of God' (Isaiah 62:5) and 'the wife of God' (Isaiah 54:1,5-6,11). In the New Testament they are symbolically called 'the bride, the wife of the Lamb' (Revelation 21:9-10; 2 Corinthians 11:2-3; Ephesians 5:25-32).

After the second coming of Christ. All believers are especially called 'the New Jerusalem' (Revelation 21:1-2,9-11). The New Jerusalem is a symbol for the final phase of the kingdom of God on the new earth after Christ's second coming. The New Jerusalem is described in glorious terms, because nothing in the entire universe is as glorious as people that fellowship with the Living God.

#### **(4) The city continually coming down (21:2b)**

*continually coming down (Greek: katabaino)(present continuous tense)* out of heaven from God. 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 overcome, 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 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; cf. 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. Matthew 25:10-11; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; John 3:18,36). Christ already now gives them eternal life through *the water of the river of life* (i.e. the Holy Spirit) (22:1; read Ezekiel 47:1-11; and cf. Matthew 13:31-33; 24:14; Acts 5:28; 17:6; 20:24-25) 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 (trees) of life represents the availability of eternal life and the abundance of the new life (22:2; 2:7; read Ezekiel 47:12 and 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 all kinds of healing for the nations (22:2; read Ezekiel 47:12 and cf. 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 (Greijdanus)<sup>2</sup>!

Even in Revelation chapter 21 and 22 *the present continuous 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 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 (i.e. a sure expectation) 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 when all things will be restored (Acts 3:21).

Question. What does it mean that the New Jerusalem is coming down out of heaven (present continuous tense)?

The New Jerusalem is at the same time 'the ideal' and 'the perfect reality'.

Before the second coming of Christ. The New Jerusalem is *the ideal* of what the people of God should be on this present earth! That is why some verbs are in *the present continuous tense*: the New Jerusalem is all the time coming down from heaven onto this earth (cf. "your kingdom come", Matthew 6:10)(21:1); Christ is all the time making people and things new (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17)(21:5); Christ is giving the water of life to those who are thirsty (cf. John 7:37-39); and the leaves of the tree of life are healing the nations (cf. Matthew 8:16-17)(Revelation 21:2,5,6; 22:2,5,6).

After the second coming of Christ. The New Jerusalem is *the perfect reality* of what the people of God will be on the new earth! That is why other verbs are in *the past tense*: the first heaven and the first earth had passed away; there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away and there will no longer be any curse (Revelation 21:1,4; 22:3). Everything written in the Bible "is done/has come to pass". The perfect tense emphasises that all these perfect results will continue for ever. The eternal God in Christ, the Beginning and the End, guarantees that this perfect reality will continue for ever (Revelation 21:6).

#### **(5) The bride (21:2c)**

prepared (*Greek: hetoimazo*)(*perfect, passive*) as a bride (*Greek: numphe*), beautifully dressed (adorned, decorated) (*Greek: kosmeo*)(*perfect, passive*) for her husband (*Greek: andros*). **In preparation for the marriage, the bride was bathed, oiled, perfumed, her hair fixed, and adorned with wedding garments.** 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 ch. 2 and 3 and in 21:5-8 and cf. Matthew 3:11-12; 8:11-12; 22:1-14).

<sup>2</sup> Greijdanus p 310

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 together (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 believers 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 all the unbelievers 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 conducted the last judgement) onto the new earth (21:1).
- The New Jerusalem will be perfectly complete. God will dwell with his people (consisting of believers from all the nations) 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, the New Jerusalem is holy and new!

#### **(6) The covenant (21:3)**

**21:3** And I heard (*Greek: akouo*)(*aurist*) a loud voice (*Greek: phone*) from the throne saying (*present*), 'Look! The dwelling (tent)(*Greek: skene*) of God (is) with men, and he will live (in a tent)(*Greek: skenoo*)(*future*) with them. 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 (Greek: skene) 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 in Christ. After Christ's second coming God will be completely visible and physical approachable in 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.

And they will be (*future*) his peoples (plural) (*Greek: laos*), and God himself will be (*future*) with them (or: be their God). 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 of Gods people 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 (like the dust of the earth)(Genesis 13:15)(as the stars in the sky)(Genesis 22:17)(as the sand on the seashore)(Genesis 22:17)! The whole Bible history is a history of God's covenant people within the history of the world (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.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The whole Bible should NOT be explained in terms of so-called (seven) dispensations.

### **(7) The renewal (21:4-5a)**

**21:4** And he will wipe away (Greek: *exaleipho*)(future) every tear (Greek: *dakruon*) from their eyes (Greek: *ophthalmos*). And death (Greek: *thanatos*) will be (future) no more (Greek: *eti*), nor (Greek: *and not*) mourning (Greek: *penthos*), nor crying (Greek: *krauge*), nor pain (Greek: *ponos*) will be (future) no more, for the first things (Greek: *ta prota*) have *once for all* time passed away (Greek: *aperchomai*)(aorist). '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 *once for all* 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.

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 (Greek: *kathizo*)(present continuous tense) on the throne said (Greek: *lego, ero, eipon, eireka*)( aorist). 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; cf. Psalm 145:13; 146:10; Isaiah 9:7).

'See, I am *continually* making (Greek: *poieo*)(present continuous tense) everything new (Greek: *kainos*)!' 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 the insight, wisdom, power and creativity of 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).

The word 'new' (Greek: *kainos*) does not mean from scratch, but rather in the sense of renewing a person that already exists (Ephesians 4:24). It means that what is old and used has become obsolete and should be replaced by what is renewed and unused. The new is superior in kind to the old. For example: the new covenant replaces the old covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 8:8), the new creature replaces the old man (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15); the New Jerusalem replaces the old Jerusalem (in reality also an old Babylon (21:1; cf. Galatians 4:25)).

### **(8) The oral tradition and the written Bible (21:5b)**

And (then) he said (Greek: *lego*)(present), 'Write (Greek: *grapho*)(imperative, aorist): (*hoti=:*) for these words are (present continuous tense) trustworthy (Greek: *pistos*) and (Greek: *alethinos*) true.' 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* of the revelation of Christ 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 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 (written) Bible and not on human or Church (oral) traditions. And that is why Christians are commanded not to go beyond what is written (perfect tense)(in the Bible) (1 Corinthians 4:6). The perfect tense expresses that they have come to pass and their results continue on in the present time.

### **(9) The Initiator and Finisher (21:6a)**

**21:6** And he said (*Greek: lego, ero, eipon, eireka*)(*aorist*) to me, ‘It is done (*Greek: ginomai, genesomai, egenomen, gegona*)(*perfect, active*)(*and the results continue on*). 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 in the present time. 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. 16:17). 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 (*Greek: arche*) and the End (*Greek: telos*). 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 JhWwH (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!

### **(10) The water of life (21:6b)**

To him who is thirsty (*Greek: dipsao*)(*present*) I will give (*Greek: didomi*)(*future*) (to drink) from the spring (*Greek: pēgē*) of the water of life without cost (freely) (*Greek: dorean*). The water of life is a symbol of eternal life, salvation full and free (Psalm 36:8-9).

The water of life before the second coming of Christ. 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 the second coming of Christ. At the ultimate 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.

### **(11) The believers overcome (21:7)**

**21:7** He who *again and again* overcomes (*Greek: nikao*)(*present*) will inherit (*Greek: kleronomeo*)(*future*) these things, and I will be (*future*) God (*Greek: theos*) to him and he will be (*future*) son (*Greek: huios*) to me. 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 fighting the war against 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).

Question. What does it mean to overcome?

Before the second coming of Christ. 'To overcome' is the responsible task and challenge of every believer on earth! To overcome is to continue to believe in Jesus Christ under all circumstances (1 John 5:5) and to remain in Christ (John 15:5). It is to exclude the devil and the sinful world from pulling you away from fellowship and service of God (1 John 2:15-17). It is to fight to the end against slackening and backsliding (1 Timothy 6:11-12; Revelation 2:4-5). It is to continually oppose unrighteousness. People who fail to overcome are unbelievers, because they prefer the power, fame and pleasures of this earth above the salvation of the new earth.

Jesus Christ has overcome the world (John 16:33). Those who believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God will overcome the world (1 John 5:5) and the evil one (1 John 2:14). Christians will overcome Satan and his demons by the blood of the Lamb (i.e. on the basis of his death for them) and by the word of their testimony (Revelation 12:11). And they will be *conquerors* that overcome those who make war on them (Revelation 17:14).

After the second coming of Christ. The believers will be *more than conquerors* through Jesus Christ (Romans 8:37)!

### **(12) The unbelievers are lost (21:8)**

**21:8** But the cowardly (*Greek: deilos*), the unbelieving (*Greek: apistos*), those who defile (pollute, make detestable, commit abominations of the non-Christians)(*Greek: bdelussomai*)(*perfect*), the murderers (*Greek: phoneus*), the sexually immoral (*Greek: pornos*), those who mix or use drugs or practise magic arts (sorcery) (*Greek: pharmakos*), the idolaters (*Greek: eidolatreis*) and all liars (*Greek: pseudes*). 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 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 part (will be) in the lake (*Greek: limne*) that burns (*Greek: kaio*)(*present*) with fire and sulphur. This is (*present*) 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)!

### **(13) Different views about the new heaven and new earth (21:1)**

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 (Larkin)<sup>4</sup>.

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. Revelation 21:9-27. THE NEW JERUSALEM (THE BRIDE OR THE WIFE OF THE LAMB)**

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.

### **(1) The city (21:9-10,18b; see also 21:2)**

**21:9** And one of the seven (*Greek: hepta*) angels who had (*present*) the bowls (*Greek: phiale*) full of (*Greek: gemo*) (*present*) the seven last (*Greek: eschatos*) plagues (*Greek: plege*) came (*Greek: erchomai*)(*aorist*) and spoke (*Greek: laleo*)(*aorist*) with me saying (*present*): 'Come (*Greek: deuro*)(*adverb or imperative active*) I will show (*Greek: deiknumi*)(*future*) you the bride (*Greek: numphe*), the wife (*Greek: gune, accusative*) of the Lamb.' One of the seven angels who had the bowls full of the seven last plagues (15:1) had shown John the great prostitute (Babylon. She is the symbol of Satan's antichristian community with its evil world culture (17:1). 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 during the New Testament period (17:9,18).
- Finally, the prostitute represents Satan's antichristian culture in connection with the final antichrist at the end of history (17:15-17).

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 (*Greek: apophero, oiso, enegka*)(*aorist*) me away in the Spirit to a mountain (*Greek: oros*) great and high (*Greek: hupselos*), and showed (*Greek: deiknumi*)(*aorist*) me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down (*Greek: katabaino*)(*present*) out of heaven from God.

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 (*Greek: to arnion*) 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. This is a symbol for 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).

<sup>4</sup> Larkin, Revelation pp. 199-203

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 on earth and in its future perfect and eternal state in the new heaven and on the new earth.

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 are 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 foreshadowing 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 6:1-2)! 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 the second coming of Christ.* 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 believers already living in heaven and the living believers on earth that are registered in heaven (Hebrews 12:22-23).

In John's vision, the New Jerusalem was *coming down (present continuous 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 sense the New Jerusalem is coming down all the time since Christ's first coming (see 21:2b). In another sense 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). After that (on the same last day) 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 kingdom of God in its final and eternal phase, which is eternal life (Matthew 25:34,46b).

*The city after the second coming of Christ.* 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 had (*Greek: echo*)(*present*) the glory of God and its radiance (brilliance)(*Greek: phoster*) was like that of (*Greek: homaios*) a very precious (*Greek: timiotatos*) stone (*Greek: lithos*) (a jewel), like a jasper, sparkling (shimmering as a crystal (*Greek: krustallizo*)(*present*)). 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).

Question. What is the meaning of each part of the holy city, the New Jerusalem?.

When John describes his vision about the New Jerusalem, he describes the wall, the gates, the foundations, and the streets of the city. These parts of the city are symbols of the New Jerusalem as the community of believers (the Church) from different points of view.

### **(2) The wall (21:12a,17-18a)**

**21:12** It had (*present*) a great high (*Greek: hupsilos*) wall (*Greek: teichos*). 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 only 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 the second coming of Christ. 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 symbolic number 144 (12x12). The number 144 symbolises the protection provided by the Triune God (3) to all his Old Testament and New Testament people (the number 12) in the world (the number 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 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 the second coming of Christ. It remains a symbol of the eternal salvation and security of God's people (the Christians).

Question. What is the meaning of the wall?

The great and high wall is for protection, safety and security of the community of believers (the Church). The wall is 144 cubits wide (about 65 metres). Three chariots and horses would be able to ride abreast on it. The number 144 (12x12) represents perfection and could be a symbol that represents God's work of salvation in the world that remains unassailable and secure!

Before the second coming of Christ. All genuine Christians are secure and remain absolutely secure in their possession of fellowship with the Living God. Jesus already said that it is not possible to deceive the elect (Matthew 24:24). He promised, "No one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28) and "Not one has been lost" (John 17:12)!

After the second coming of Christ. All genuine believers in the Bible will forever remain secure in their possession of fellowship with God in Christ. They "will not be condemned" (John 5:24), "they shall never perish" (John 10:28), but have everlasting life (Matthew 25:46).

### **(3) The gates (21:12b -13,21,25; 22:14-15)**

with (*literally: having*)(*present*) twelve (*Greek: dodeka*) gates (*Greek: pulon*) and with twelve angels at the gates. And on the gates were written (*Greek: epigrapho*)(*perfect*) the names (*Greek: onoma*) of the twelve tribes (*Greek: phule*) of Israel.

**21:13** on the east (*Greek: anatole*) three (*Greek: treis*) gates, and on the north (*Greek: borras*) three gates, on the south (*Greek: notos*) three gates and on the west (*Greek: dusmos*) three gates. 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 at the present time) 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 the second coming of Christ. 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? Which comes first: the roads or the gates? 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 (on your way) 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 Jesus speaks of two gates and two ways, but in Luke 13 he speaks of only one *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, 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 the second coming of Christ.* 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). The open gates remain for ever witnesses to the inviting character of the Kingdom of God and are witnesses that the citizens of the New Jerusalem would never be threatened by danger anymore!

Question. What is the meaning of the gates?

The gates are *a symbol* for entering into the community of the people who have fellowship with God (the Church). The names of the 12 tribes of Israel that are written on the gates indicate that only those who belong to the people of God (believers, Galatians 6:14-16; James 1:1) will live in this city.

*Before the second coming of Christ.* The gates are never shut and there is abundant opportunity to enter by faith into the community of believers. The gates face all directions and they gather people from every nation in the world (cf. Isaiah 43:5-7; Matthew 24:14; Revelation 5:9). Angels guard the gates, so that no evil, ungodly unbeliever is able to enter the city (Revelation 21:27). Old Testament people like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, David and Daniel have entered by faith (Genesis 15:6; Luke 20:37-38). All New Testament people who have washed their clothes in the blood of the

Lamb have the right to enter into the city (Revelation 22:14)! Before one's death or Christ's second coming there is opportunity to enter into the community of believers (Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 13:23-30).

At the second coming of Christ. The gates will be shut and there will be no longer any opportunity to be saved (Matthew 25:10-13; 2 Corinthians 6:1-2; 13:5)! It means that only those whose names are written in the book of life of Jesus Christ will enter the city (Revelation 21:27).

After the second coming of Christ. The gates will never be shut again and symbolises uninhibited fellowship with God on the new earth.

#### **(4) 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 (Hebrews 1:14) and symbolic angels, the messengers of God on earth (cf. 2:1).

The angels before the second coming of Christ. 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)
- people who harden themselves and refuse to repent (Matthew 11:20-24; Romans 1:18)
- people who reject Jesus Christ (Matthew 21:42-44; Luke 10:16)
- people who do not wear the wedding clothes Christ provides (Matthew 22:11-14; Romans 13:14)
- and people 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 the second coming of Christ. 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 (21:27)! All godless and wicked people and their evil works will be cast into the lake of burning sulphur (21:8).

#### **(5) 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 (literally: the called out ones)(cf. Psalm 107:32<sup>5</sup>; 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.e. the Jewish tribe). 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).

The names of the twelve tribes after the second coming of Christ. God's people have been chosen before the creation of the world (James 1:1,18; Ephesians 1:3). Isaiah 49:15-16 is true before and after the second coming of Christ. "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I (i.e. the LORD) will not forget you! See, I have engraved you (your name) on the palms of my hands; your walls (the walls of the New Jerusalem) are ever before me."

#### **(6) The foundations (21:14)**

**21:14** The wall (*Greek: teichos*) of the city had (*present*) twelve foundations (*Greek: themelios*), and on them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Again because the names of the apostles are not listed, there is no ground to

<sup>5</sup> The 'assembly' of Israel is called 'church' (Greek: ekklesia) in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Judges 20:2; 2 Chronicles 29:28; Psalm 22:22).

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 of Jesus Christ (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 on a higher plane (the fulfilment) and extended (enlarged) 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 from a great number of sheepfolds (i.e. the Jewish nation and all the non-Jewish nations)(John 10:16).

Question. What is the meaning of the foundations?

The foundations are *a symbol* for supporting the city that consists of the community of believers. The names of the 12 apostles of Jesus Christ that are written on the foundations indicate that they founded the historical Christian Church (Matthew 16:18-19, Acts 1:8; Ephesians 2:20; 3:5-6; Revelation 21:14). They are the eyewitnesses and ear-witnesses of Jesus Christ (who is the real foundation of the Christian Church, 1 Corinthians 3:11).

Before the second coming of Christ. The apostles laid the foundation of the historical Church by their proclamation and writing of the New Testament and brought people to Jesus Christ and into the heavenly Jerusalem (the Church) (Galatians 4:26). The precious stones, which adorn the foundations (Isaiah 54:11-12; Revelation 21:19-21), are *symbols* of the manifold wisdom and virtues of God, which the Church proclaims (Ephesians 3:10).

After the second coming of Christ. The community of believers (the kingdom) will never be shaken, because God Himself is the architect and builder of the city (Hebrews 11:10; 12:28)! \_

#### **(7) The size and shape of the city (21:15-16)**

**21:15** The (angel) who spoke (*Greek: laleo*)(*present*) to me had (*Greek: echo, hexo, eichon, escheka*)(*imperfect*) a golden (*Greek chrusous*) measuring (*Greek: metron*) reed (*Greek: kalamos*) in order to measure (*Greek: metreo*) (*subjunctive, aorist*) the city, its gates and its walls.

**21:16** And the city lay (*Greek: keimai*)(*present*) square (four corners)(*Greek: tetragonos*), and her length (*Greek: mekos*) (was)(in size) as (*Greek: hosos*) the width (*Greek: platos*). And he measured (*Greek: metreo*)(*aorist*) the city with the reed at (*Greek: epi*) 12 000 stadia, her, length, width and height were (*present*) equal (*Greek: isos*). '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 stadium 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 symbolic number 12 000 is the product of 3x4 x 10x10x10. 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 (10x10x10) represents absolute completeness on earth that has been ordained (planned) and executed by God himself. Therefore, the number 12 000 x 12 000 x 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 symbolic number "144 000" expresses the complete and perfect result of the saving power and transforming grace of the Triune God on earth in terms of God's Old Testament people and God's New Testament people. 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 in the history of the world 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.<sup>6</sup> This cube form was foreshadowed by the Holy of holies in the tabernacle and temple of Solomon (1 Kings 6:20), which was

<sup>6</sup> 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.

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 the second coming of Christ. 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 for ever and against being condemned together with the godless and evil world (cf. John 6:37-40; 10:27-30)!

The measured city after the second coming of Christ. 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 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).

Question. Why is the city shaped like a cube?

The shape of a cube. The city has symbolically the form of a great cube, 12 000 x 12 000 x 12 000 stadia big. Literally 12 000 stadia is about 2 200 kilometres, but the city is not a literal city and also its shape is not literally a cube! Both the form and its measurements are *symbols*.

The form of a cube was foreshadowed by the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle and temple of Solomon (1 Kings 6:20). During the Old Testament period this Most Holy Place, containing the ark, was regarded as the dwelling of God with all his glory (1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Kings 8:10-11). In the New Testament the Most Holy Place is a symbol of heaven, the dwelling of God, itself (Hebrews 9:12,24).

The New Jerusalem in the form of a cube.

Before the second coming of Christ. 'The Heavenly Jerusalem' (Galatians 4:26), as 'the temple of God' (2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:22) and as 'the New Jerusalem' in the shape of 'the Most Holy Place' in the temple (Revelation 21:16) are *symbols of the community of believers (the Church) in its ideal form* as the dwelling of God on the present earth. The Church is regarded as the dwelling of God through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22)!

The number 12 000 is the product of 3 times 4 times 10 times 10 times 10. The number 3 represents *God* (Matthew 28:19). The number 4 represents the *world* (Revelation 7:1). The number 12 represents *God's people* (Revelation 21:12,14), the result of his work of salvation in the world. The number 10 is *the complete number on earth* (10 virgins or 10 servants represent all people, Matthew 25:1; Luke 19:13) and the number 10x10x10 is *the absolute and divine complete number on earth* (Exodus 20:6; Isaiah 60:21-22). Thus the number 12 000 x 12 000 x 12 000 is a *symbol* and could represent the complete and perfect result of the work of salvation of the Triune God among all the nations on earth *in every generation!* That number will be reached in every generation (cf. Romans 11:4-5). Not one of the elect will be deceived (Matthew 24:24) and not one of the elect will be lost (John 10:28; 17:12)!

After the second coming of Christ. 'The New Jerusalem' (Revelation 21:1-2) in the shape of a cube (Revelation 21:16) is a *symbol of the community of believers (the Church) in its final perfect form* as the dwelling of God on the new earth, for ever shining with the brilliant light of God's glory (Revelation 21:3,11).

The number 12 000 x 12 000 x 12 000 is a symbol and could represent the complete and perfect result of the work of salvation of the Triune God among all the nations on earth *throughout the history of this world!* The number could represent all the elect believers from the creation of the world to the renewal of the world: "the fullness of Israel" and "the fullness of the Gentiles" and will be reached just before Christ's second coming (Romans 11:12,25-26; 2 Timothy 2:19).



**21:17** He measured (*Greek: metreo*)(*aorist*) her wall: hundred (*Greek: hekaton*) forty (*Greek: tesserakonta*) four (*Greek: tessera*) cubits (*Greek: pechus*), (by) a measurement of man, which is (*present*) of an angel.

**21:18** And the structure (interior structure, construction, material) (*Greek: endomesis*) of her wall (was) jasper, and the city (was) with pure gold, as with pure glass (*Greek: hualos*). See the wall and the city above.

#### **(8) The precious stones on the foundations (21:19-20)**

**21:19** The foundations (*Greek: themelion*) of the city walls were decorated (*Greek: kosmeo*)(*perfect, passive*) with every kind (*Greek: panti*) of precious stone (*Greek: lithos timeos*). The first foundation was jasper (*Greek: iaspis*), the second sapphire (*Greek: sapphiros*), the third chalcedony (*Greek: chalkedon*), the fourth emerald (***Greek: smaragdos***),

**21:20** the fifth sardonyx (*Greek: sardonux*), the sixth carnelian (*Greek: sardion*), the seventh chrysolite (*Greek: chrusolithos*), the eighth beryl (*Greek: byrillos*), the ninth topaz (*Greek: topazion*), the tenth chrysoprase (*Greek: chrusoprasos*), the eleventh jacinth (*Greek: uakinthos*), and the twelfth amethyst (*Greek: amethystos*). 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 the second coming of Christ. 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 or their colours. Together, these precious stones symbolise the dazzling attraction of the city, 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 the second coming of Christ. 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).

#### **(9) The streets (21:21b; 22:2)**

**21:21** The twelve gates (were) twelve pearls (*Greek: margarites*), each single one (*Greek: ana heis*) of the gates was (*imperfect*) from one (*Greek: eis, mia, hen*) pearl and the street of the city (was) of pure gold (*Greek: chrusion*), like transparent (clear)(*Greek: diauges*) glass (crystal)(*Greek: hualos*). 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 the second coming of Christ. 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 the second coming of Christ. 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.

### **(10) The temple (21:22)**

**21:22** And I did not see (*Greek: horao, opsomai, eidon, heoraka*)(*aorist*) a temple (*Greek: vaos*) in her (the city), because the Lord God Almighty is (*present*) her temple, also the Lamb.

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 (based on 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 Assyria and Babylon (Ezekiel 37:15-28) 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 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)
- God would 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 (himself) will be a refuge and stronghold for his people." "The LORD dwells in Zion, his holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy; never again will foreigners invade her" (Joel 3:16-17).

The temple before the second coming of Christ. The absence of a physical 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<sup>7</sup> 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 (i.e. the believers and not the church building) 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 the first coming of Christ fellowship with God is no longer practised in a particular religious building or by means of particular religious ceremonies in a literal building. 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 templebuilding (Act 7:48-49; 17:24-28).

The temple after the second coming of Christ. In the final state, the radiance of God's majesty and glory will not be limited to a particular place (i.e. any holy city<sup>8</sup> with its sanctuary) anymore, but will manifest itself visibly everywhere in the community of his people (the believers and not the church building) (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.

Question. Why is there no temple in the new city?

Before the first coming of Christ. During the Old Testament period the temple building was regarded as the dwelling of God. The glory of God in the cloud by day and in the fire by night was regarded to dwell above the cherubim above the

<sup>7</sup> Godsdienstige gebouwen: tempels, kerkgebouwen, moskees, heiligdommen van alle godsdiensten.

<sup>8</sup> Zgn. heilige steden als Jeruzalem, Varanasi, Bodh Gaja, Mekka, Salt Lake City, enz.

ark in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle or temple (Exodus 25:22; 40:34-38; 1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Kings 19:15). The radiance of the glory of God was limited to the Most Holy Place in the temple building. But already the prophet Isaiah prophesied that God Himself would be the sanctuary for those who feared (trusted in) God (Isaiah 8:13-14).

After the first coming of Christ. The temple building ceased to be the visible symbol of God's dwelling (John 2:19; Acts 7:44-50; 17:24-25). The curtain of the temple in Jerusalem had been torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51) in order to symbolise that from then on everyone who believes in Jesus Christ has direct access to God through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:18; 3:12; Hebrews 4:14-16). From the Christian point of view there are no longer specific holy places or holy buildings in the whole world!

After the first coming of Christ the community of believers (the Church) is the temple of God and God dwells in them through his Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:22; 1 Peter 2:5). And the radiance of the glory of God now becomes visible in the (believers of the) Church (2 Corinthians 3:18; Matthew 5:16).

After the second coming of Christ. The situation will be reversed: God in Jesus Christ will be the visible temple of the New Jerusalem and the community of believers (the Church) will dwell in the God who revealed himself in Christ. Then Colossians 3:3-4<sup>9</sup> is no longer a hidden reality. What the prophet Isaiah prophesied is then completely fulfilled: God has become their sanctuary, where they dwell, where they are sheltered and where they worship and serve forever. And the radiance of the glory of God will dominate the whole new earth.

### **(11) The light (21:23; 22:5)**

**21:23** And the city does not have (*present*) need (*Greek: chreia*) the sun (*Greek: helios*) or the moon (*Greek: selene*) in order to give light in (shine) (*Greek: phaino*)(*subjunctive, present*) her, for the glory of God *once for all time* illuminates (give light)(*Greek photizo*)(*aorist*) her, and her lamp (*Greek: luchnos*) (is) the Lamb. 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 at the first coming of Christ. 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 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 before the second coming of Christ. 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.

The light after the second coming of Christ. At the second coming of Christ 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, perfect and visible 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 and his characteristics 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.

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<sup>9</sup> Colossians 3:3-4, "Your life is now hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

Question. Why is there no sun, moon or lights in the new city?

There is no sun, moon or lights in the city, because God in Christ is its 'light'. Christ is specifically called 'the lamp of the city'.

Before the second coming of Christ. Christ is the light of the world (John 8:12) because he visibly revealed God to man (John 1:4-5; 14:9; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Colossians 1:15) and now imparts the true and saving knowledge of God to believers (John 8:19). Believers see Jesus Christ now with their spiritual eyes.

After the second coming of Christ. Christ will be the light and lamp of the community of believers (the Church) on the new earth (Revelation 21:23) because he will continually and visibly reveal the face and perfect characteristics of God to believers. God is Spirit and lives visibly among believers on the new earth through Jesus Christ. Believers will see Jesus Christ then also with their physical eyes (Revelation 22:4)!

### **(12) The nations (21:24-26)**

**21:24** And the nations (*Greek: ethne*) will walk (*Greek: peripateo*)(*future*) by its light (*Greek: phos*), and the kings of the earth (will) bring (carry)(*Greek: phero, oiso, enegka*)(*present*) their glory into it.

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; cf. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15)! Whatever in their personalities, works 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 (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** And her gates (*Greek: pulon, pulones*) will never in any way (*Greek: ou me*) be shut (locked)(*Greek: kleio*) (*subjunctive, aorist*) by day, for night will not be (*future*) there.

**21:26** and they will bring (*Greek: phero, oiso, enegka*)(*future*) the glory (*Greek: doxa*) and honour (*Greek: time*) into her.

Question. Who are the nations in the New Jerusalem and what do they bring into the New Jerusalem?

Before the second coming of Christ. Many people in every nation and language on earth will accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, enter the open gate (Matthew 7:13-14), bring in the wealth of their nation (Isaiah 60:11) and become a part of the heavenly Jerusalem (Matthew 24:14; Revelation 5:9-10). They will worship God through Jesus Christ in everything that is good in their science and its application (in the medical, agricultural, social, etc. world), in their specific culture (poetry, writings, music and dance) and in their personal life (character and good deeds).

After the second coming of Christ. When the heavenly Jerusalem has descended as the New Jerusalem on the new earth, people from every tribe, language and nation will forever be a part of the believing people of God (the Church) on the new earth. There is and will be a great variety of people and a great variety of splendour on the new earth! Whatever in their earthly sojourn and culture stood the test of the fire of judgement (Matthew 3:11-12; 13:40-43; 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Peter 3:10), whatever is glorious and honourable (Philippians 4:8), whatever deeds that were done "from God, through God and for God and his glory" (Romans 11:36; John 15:5) will not be in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58) and will

follow them into the New Jerusalem (14:13)! Think of the uncountable number of beautiful characters of individuals; think of the many lost people that have been saved from every people, tribe, language and nation (5:9-10), think of the science, skills, music, songs, art, writings and all kinds of work that glorify God. Nothing that is evil or ungodly will ever enter the New Jerusalem (21:27). Only those whose names are written in Christ's book of life, will enter the New Jerusalem (20:15).

### **(13) Those included and those excluded (21:27)**

**21:27** And never in any way will enter (*Greek: eiserchomai, eleusomai, elthon, elelutha*)(*subjunctive, aorist*) into her anything common (that which comes in contact with anything and everything and therefore is common, ordinary and profane)(*Greek: koinos*), nor what makes (*present*) detestable (abomination)(*Greek: bdelugma*) or deceitful (*Greek: pseudos*), except (*Greek: ei me*) those written (*perfect*) in the book of life of the Lamb.

The New Jerusalem before the second coming of Christ. 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 true believers who on the one hand still live on earth (the firstborn) whose names are written in the book of life in heaven, and who on the other hand live 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 besides real angels also 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 the second coming of. 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).

### **(14) Different views about the city (21:2)**

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 (Larkin)<sup>10</sup>!

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).

### **(15) Different views about the nations (21:24-27)**

The futurist view. The nations are only the Gentile nations (the Jewish nation is excluded). 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) (Larkin)<sup>11</sup>.

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).

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<sup>10</sup> Larkin, Revelation pp. 203-205

<sup>11</sup> Larkin, Revelation pp. 206-207