

New Jerusalem

by Lynn Andrew

Both Isaiah and John wrote about a new earth and a holy city of the future where there will be no sun because the Lord will be the light (Isaiah 60:19-20, Revelation 21:23, 22:5). This synchronizes the two accounts, and we can assume that they are referring to the same thing, being inspired by the same God of the spirits of the prophets (Rev. 22:6): it would be odd if Isaiah missed what John saw and if John failed to account for what Isaiah saw. In fact John's account is strikingly similar to Isaiah's up to a point, after which it goes on to reveal some interesting facts about the city christened New Jerusalem.

Their separate visions coincide as follows:

- Bride of Lord, Lamb (Is. 54:5-6, 62:4, 5; Rev. 21:9)
- Walls (Is. 60:10, 62:6; Rev. 21:12, 17)
- Open gates (Is. 60:11; Rev. 21:25)
- Riches, jewels (Is. 60:6, 9, 17, 61:10, 62:3; Rev. 21:18, 19, 21)
- Kings contribute (Is 60:5-7, 10, 13, 16; Rev. 21:24, 26)
- Served by nations (Is. 60:10, 12, 16, 61:5,6; Rev. 21:26)
- Light to nations (Is. 60:3, 62:1; Rev. 21:24)
- Nothing unholy (Is. 60:21, 61:10, 11, 62:2, 12, Rev. 21:27)
- Israel featured (Is. 60:4, 9, 10, 16, 61:9, 66:22; Rev. 21:12)
- Permanent (Is 54:10, 60:15, 21; Rev. 22:5)

Note the terrestrial elements. Isaiah and John agree that the setting is not radically different from the earth we know: New Jerusalem is an exceptional place on this earth, which it interfaces with walls and gates. The newness is substantially the novelty of a government that imprisons Satan; in particular the attitude of other nations toward Jerusalem is far more favorable than ever in its history. "I am making

all things new," declares the LORD in Revelation 21:5. Quite clearly this is the beginning of the Millennium, not the end as some have concluded merely by the position of the chapter in the book. Compare 20:7-10 with 21:24-27 to prove that chapter 21 is not simply a sequel to 20.

John notes that there is no sea. But seas still exist in Isaiah 60:5. (Also Psalm. 72:8, Isaiah 42:10, Ezekiel 47, Zechariah 9:10.) So the solid surface of the earth that comes to mind when we are told there will be no sea may well be a metaphor that stands for something else. The restless sea is a figure for the conflicts among nations (Isaiah 17:12, Ezekiel. 26:3, Luke 21:25). So the absence of sea means the end of political turmoil and the presence of peace on earth among men whom our Lord is pleased to bless.

Both Isaiah and John declare that heaven will be new too. But it was left to John to detail what that means: that heaven will have a radical presence through which God effectively dwells with man, and it may be said that the seat of his government—not merely a token of his presence—is right there in Jerusalem. This, more than anything else, is a new arrangement for both heaven and earth.

John had the privilege of previewing the heavenly component of New Jerusalem, and he put it down in words as best he could. The size and shape and the appearance of its construction correspond to nothing on earth. Its three dimensions, each represented as 1000 times 12 in length, must be outside of our three spatial dimensions. If the golden rod used by the angel to measure them was the same ten-foot length as the reed in Ezekiel's vision, he would have to mark its length more than two million times, traveling over four thousand miles in the process. It does not fit Ezekiel's plan for the city nor could it even

sit on this earth, and that is the point. In geometry, a new dimension brings in a new space, not merely an extension of the existing space. We may reasonably conclude that the bejeweled Jerusalem that John saw coming out of heaven is not subject to earthly limits. It is like the invisible Spirit that dwells in a body. John was carried away in the Spirit to a high mountain in order to see it (Rev. 21:10). We can infer from this that it would be invisible to someone in a natural body.

The transparent gold of which the heavenly city is entirely made clearly represents what is exquisitely noble yet invisible to earthly eyes. Being called the bride, the wife of the Lamb, further removes the holy city from anything made of bricks and mortar or even of the finest marble, and it removes any distinction between the city and its people. In other words, the essence of the city is us, and our heavenly living arrangements are secondary. If the holy city is the holy people, our temple is the Lord, and our sacrifice is the person of the Lamb—which John makes clear by pointing out that there is no temple there, only the throne of God and the Lamb.

The twelve apostles of Jesus are memorialized in the foundations of the spiritual walls that separate New Jerusalem from all religions of the world, and the jewels of their crowns adorn the footings.

The twelve gates in the physical walls welcome all tribes of the earth that call the Lamb their God and King and have befriended the children of Israel who built the first temple of the living God in Zion and who now share the administration of his government with the church, the pearls which the Lamb purchased at great price.

John goes on to convey what he saw inside the holy city:

He [the angel] showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. (Rev. 22:1)

Before assuming that this is a stream of earthly liquid, recall that Jesus used *rivers* as a figure for the life of salvation:

"He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, from within him will flow rivers of living water." (John 7:38-39)

Again, he told the woman at the well,

"Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will not thirst again; the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." (John 4:14)

Jesus promised a stream of living water, symbolically referring to salvation. The scripture he cited is Isaiah 12:3-6, which looks forward to the time when the God of Israel dwells in Jerusalem:

With joy you will draw water out of the wells of salvation.

In that day you will say,

"Give thanks to the LORD!

Call on his name.

Declare his doings among the peoples.

Proclaim that his name is exalted!

Sing to the LORD, for he has done excellent things!

Let this be known in all the earth!

Cry aloud and shout, you inhabitant of Zion,

for great in the midst of you is the Holy One of Israel!"

The prophet Joel's magnificent metaphor agrees with this:

It will happen in that day that the mountains will drop down sweet wine, the hills will flow with milk, all the brooks of Judah will flow with waters, and a fountain will come forth from the house of the LORD and will water the valley of Shittim. (Joel 3:18)

The valley of Shittim, located on the east side of the Jordan valley,

was the scene of immorality and idolatry early in Israel's history. A stream of physical water would not get there from Jerusalem, so this is purely a figure for salvation from sin's penalty. Some translations take the Hebrew *Shittiyim* not to be the name of the place but instead translate it, making it refer to acacia trees; so the temple's fountain waters a grove of trees, which excludes the interpretation that the fountain is the blood of the sacrifice, cleansing the worst sins of Israel. How could anyone force the fountain to be simply literal when the verse packs two obvious metaphors ahead of it?

In Revelation 21, Jesus repeats the promise ("To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of the river of life without payment"), and then in chapter 22 the river of life is seen flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb. The symbolism is plain: this is the means of salvation or rejuvenation of the war-torn earth. The river is of crystal-clear water, symbolizing that it remains pure and clean and does not lose its power to clean the remnants of sin from the earth. Such will be the administration of the King in that day.

Of course there is a transition period when the new administration is being established. The Prophets mention this often. Psalm 46 is an example that includes the seas and the river and helps to establish the meanings of these biblical metaphors:

... the mountains are shaken into the heart of the seas ...
the waters of it roar and are troubled ...
the mountains tremble with their swelling.

These mountains are the high seats of power among the nations being thrown down at the coming of Christ. Immediately the psalmist contrasts the noisy waters of the nations with his firm government:

There is a river, the streams of which make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.

God is in her midst. She shall not be moved.

God will help her at dawn.

The nations raged.

The kingdoms were moved.

He lifted his voice, and the earth melted.

In the 33rd chapter of Isaiah the prophet is describing the future reign of the King when there is no fear of enemies, when Jerusalem is untroubled by threats of foreign domination (17-20); then he casts a metaphor that captures the feeling:

There the LORD will be with us in majesty, a place of broad rivers and streams in which shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby. (Is. 33:21)

If we were arguing for literal rivers in the new Jerusalem, this verse would seem to support the case, but taken in its context it betrays a metaphorical construction meant to say that while the peaceful city under normal circumstances would be a magnet for conquerors wanting to annex it to their domains, no invaders will come near.

However, none of this proves there will be no streams in Zion. Symbolism can be found in almost anything. How often do artists and architects intentionally design symbolism into their works? The expositor who argues for exclusively symbolical interpretations ignores this and must have an unspoken reason for doing so.

Having established the prevalence of *river* as a symbol of salvation, we should keep that in mind when we approach Ezekiel chapter 47. In the first twelve verses he focuses on the material side of the earth's salvation and puts the river's cleansing power to work on that,

which is certainly an important aspect of the administration of the Lamb. Ezekiel's metaphors are bold, and the details in the vision make it seem an actual stream of water. It flows from the new temple, which belongs to the material side of New Jerusalem. But the increasing volume of the river is not realistic, which suggests that it symbolizes a greater salvation than if taken literally. Zechariah 14:8 mentions the same streams and calls them "living waters." But that does not preclude there also being literal waters flowing from the temple.

Similarly, the tree of life as it is described in Rev. 22:2 has difficulty being an earthly tree. For one thing it grows on both sides of the river while being represented as singular. Its twelve kinds of fruit cry out for an interpretation, as do its leaves that are said to be sufficient to heal the nations. Like the river, the tree with its fruit and medicinal leaves represents the nourishing and healing of the world that will take place when the government is on the shoulders of Christ. Symbolically, at least, the river and the tree have their origins in Eden. In Ezekiel 47:12 we find that the tree becomes many trees on the banks of the river even outside of the city walls. The prototypical twelve kinds of fruit become all kinds of food twelve months of the year while the multiplied leaves remain good for healing. Perhaps natural life spans will increase during the Millennium, thanks to the Tree of Life.

Any number of analogies could not fully represent or communicate the glories of Christ's administration. As promised, he will employ the saints, the sanctified body of Christ, which has its headquarters in the heavenly New Jerusalem, and there is no analogy in that.

Note that the "where" of this heavenly component of the future Jerusalem is "nowhere" because its dimensions do not correspond to

the three-dimensional space occupied by cities on earth. By the same token it is "anywhere" and no place on earth will be distant or hidden from the city whose righteous reign is measured by rods of pure gold when it wields the rigorous rod of iron.

Isaiah in 60:11 says the gates will be open day and night. In the same passage he says there will be no night because the Lord will be the constant illumination. John agrees with this in Rev. 21:25 after saying that the glory of God is what gives the light, and the lamp is the Lamb. Light represents the revelation of truth, which is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Physical light allows us to see with our physical eyes, to observe and gather knowledge. In the presence of God in the holy city we get knowledge by a better means. But what Isaiah means is primarily political. In 60:1 when he says, "Your light has come; the glory of the LORD has risen upon you (Jerusalem)," the context is international relations. Nations are drawn to the light, kings to brightness, rising to worship the LORD (Is. 60:3).

This is spirit-sight, not eyesight. Righteousness is brightness and salvation is like a burning torch (Is. 62:1) Within this metaphor there is no need for sunlight: the glory of God enlightens every mind; its lamp is the Lamb. The glory of Jerusalem is not revealed by sunlight.

The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it,
and his servants [that's us] will serve him.

They [we] will see his face,
and his name will be on their [our] foreheads.

[In other words:]

There will be no night, and they [we] will need no lamp light,
for the Lord God will illuminate them [us],
and they [we] will reign forever and ever. (Rev. 22:3-5)

Interpretations such as these are bound to be near the mark because the end conditions are stated in the Prophets. Jesus too spoke of the day when God will dwell with men: he told his disciples that the sanctified (pure in heart) will be made glad simply by seeing God. He listed a few of the many types of gladness that his government will bring: employment in the kingdom for those who are not competitive (the poor in spirit); ownership of land for those who are not proud (the meek); restoration of relationships for the bereaved (mourners); satisfaction for those who yearn (hunger and thirst) for justice; golden returns for followers of the golden rule (obtaining mercy); honor for ambassadors to the nations (called children of God); guaranteed positions of authority—great rewards—for those who were persecuted for doing good in their former lives (theirs is the kingdom heaven); the blessing of perfect government (till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle will not pass from the law till all be fulfilled); consistent enforcement (whoever teaches others to break even the least commandment will be least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever obeys and upholds the law will be great in the kingdom of heaven).

I heard a loud voice out of heaven saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with people; he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more. The first things have passed away." (Rev 21:3-4)

"To him who overcomes I will give these things. I will be his God, and he will be my son." (Rev. 21:7)

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. (2 Cor. 5:17)

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