

New Jerusalem

Bible Dictionaries - Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology

The eternal climax of redemptive history is previewed in John's description of the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22. The **new Jerusalem** is the focus for activity on the **new earth**. The new Jerusalem motif provides an elaboration of the nature of the new heavens and new earth introduced in Revelation 21:1.

The first explicit reference to the new Jerusalem is in the message to the Philadelphia church in Revelation 3:12, where it is promised as a reward to those who overcome (a synonym for believers, cf. [1 John 5:4-5](#)). Jerusalem provides an image of continuity that brings together earth and eschatological history in regard to where God and his people dwell together.

The general image of a future Jerusalem symbolizes the fulfillment of many of God's promises to his people (cf. [Isa 2:1-5](#) ; [49:14-18](#) ; 52; 54; 60-62; [65:17-25](#) ; [Jer 31:38-40](#) ; [Micah 4:1-4](#) ; [Zech 14](#)). The idea of an idealized and/or eschatological Jerusalem is referred to in other ways than the phrase "new Jerusalem."

Although the Old Testament contains no explicit reference to a new Jerusalem, Isaiah includes Jerusalem in his new heavens and new earth statements ([65:17-19](#) ; [66:22](#)). Paul's allegory of the "above Jerusalem" in Galatians 4:25-26, provides an idealized imagery for Jerusalem. Hebrews 12:22 speaks of the "heavenly Jerusalem." Revelation 21:2, 10 refer to the new Jerusalem as the "Holy City" (cf. [Matt 4:5](#) ; [27:53](#)). Revelation 2:7, "**paradise of God**", may anticipate the **new Jerusalem** of Revelation 21-22.

The concentration on a restored Jerusalem as a symbol of the fulfillment of God's promises to the Jewish people is also present in noncanonical literature. These occurrences highlight the Jewish hope for a new world where their ideals would be fulfilled. First Enoch 90:28-29 relates a vision of a transformation of the "old house" into a new one, representing a transformed Jerusalem. Sibylline Oracles 5:414-29 record God's provision of a new city (a temple is included in contrast to Rev. 21-22, which may reflect a more earth-oriented perspective). Second Baruch 32:1-4 speaks of the new city that will be rebuilt after the old is shaken and uprooted as being "perfected into eternity" (cf. 2 Esdras 7:26; 10:25-28; 13:36; Tobit 13:8-18; T Dan 5:12-13). Second Baruch 4 compares the new city to the original "paradise", an interesting comparison in light of Revelation 2:7. God's creative work begins and ends with paradise.

The **contextual setting** of the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22 is closely related to the evil city, Babylon, of the Great Harlot in Revelation 17-19. The linguistic comparisons of the possible terminal points of each vision are most striking (cf. [17:1-3](#) with [21:9-10](#) ; [19:9b-10](#) with [22:6-9](#)). Both cities are also viewed as **women**, the harlot and the bride. **God's answer to the evil structures of this world is the paradise regained in the new Jerusalem.**

The meaning of the imagery of Revelation 21:9-22:5 is reasonably well established in biblical and extrabiblical patterns. The use of the bride metaphor ([21:2](#)) does not restrict the reference to the church of the new Testament, but should be viewed in its wider biblical usage as a reference to the people of God who are married to the Lord (cf. [Isa 61:10](#) ; Hos. 1-3; [John 3:29](#) ; [Eph 5:25-33](#)). Revelation 21:9 equates the images of bride and wife.

The inclusion of both Israel and the church is required by the description of the city (cf. [Hebrews 11:10](#) [Hebrews 11:16](#)). Israel's twelve tribes and the church's twelve apostles are both included. The stones ([21:19-21](#)) solicit remembrance of the high priest's breastplate ([Exod 28:17-21](#) ; [39:10-14](#)) and Ezekiel's garden of God ([28:13](#)), although the lists are not the same and John applies the stones to the twelve apostles. The fountain of life ([Rev 21:6](#)) and the river ([22:1-2](#)) remind one of Ezekiel 47, but in Ezekiel the

river proceeds from the temple and in Revelation 22 from the throne. The **new city**, however, is essentially a **new temple** since it is **God's dwelling place** and the **center of religious activity**. The new Jerusalem is a cube of enormous proportions (12,000 furlongs is about 1,500 miles), although the use of the number 12 could be symbolic. The Holy of Holies in the temple of the Old Testament was also a cube (cf. [1 Kings 6:20](#)). The tree of life ([Rev 22:2](#)) hearkens back to the prefall Eden. It is noteworthy that the new Jerusalem has **no sun or moon** but is illuminated by the effulgence of **God's glory**.

How is the reality of the new Jerusalem on the new earth of Revelation 21-22 to be understood?

- Is it merely an allegorical description of the final state of the church with no real future new earth locality in view?
- Is it a literal city that may hover over the millennial earth and house the glorified church-age saints during that period and then be transferred for expanded purposes into the eternal state after the renovation of the earth (some dispensationalists; but, some non-dispensationalists also apply it to the millennial period)?
- Is it a literal city distinctly designed as a center focus for all the redeemed in the eternal state?
- Is the vision of John, given in apocalyptic motifs, merely a statement in sophisticated symbolism that God will be victor in the climax of history?

These and other proposals appear in the literature that addresses this interpretive aspect of the new Jerusalem. Many commentaries prefer to focus on an explanation of the larger meaning of the symbolism without addressing this question. Apocalyptic genre neither demands nor excludes a literal future city. It does, however, expect the interpreter to concentrate on the message of the symbolic motifs rather than endeavor to draw a blueprint of the structure.

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