

The Twitter Commentary on Revelation
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Revelation Chapter 21

Rev 21 (Introduction)--

The Bible offers a comprehensive picture of a great universal conflict, but that picture would not be complete without the book of Revelation, nor would Rev be complete without its two last important chapters.

Is the description of the New Jerusalem meant to be taken literally, or is it symbolic of an indescribable reality? Although the city is placed in the future, it is described in familiar terms from the past: the Garden of Eden, old Jerusalem, etc.

Rev 21 (Structure)—

The chapter naturally divides into two main parts (three parts if you include 22:1-5). There is a general overview of the new earth (21:1-8), followed by a rather detailed description of the New Jerusalem itself.

The visions of Revelation 21-22 are progressive: The city is first announced (Rev 21:1-8); then it is described in detail (Rev 21:9-27); after which the central features of the city are described (Rev 22:1-5).

As John moves toward the new Jerusalem, its details become clearer in progressive fashion. The city is described as if John is approaching it from a distance.

Rev 21:1-8 (Structure)—

There is no temple in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:22), the New Jerusalem itself is the temple, a perfect cube (Rev 21:16), just like the Most Holy Place in the Israelite temple (1 Kings 6:20, cf. Ezek 41:4).

This section falls naturally into three parts. The first (21:1-2) is a narration from John himself, the second part (21:3-4) is an audition by a “voice from the throne”, the third (21:5-8) is an audition by God Himself.

Rev 21:1--

The verse begins with “and I saw”, which signals a new section in Rev. The scene introduced here seems generally after the judgment scene of 20:11-15, but there are aspects of 21:1-8 that fit better before (21:2, 8).

A key issue in this verse is the meaning of “heaven” (Greek: *ouranon*). Should it be translated “sky” or “heaven”—the place where God dwells. I think the more local term (sky) fits the context more closely.

The concept of a new heaven and a new earth echoes earlier visions of the future, like Isa 65:17, 2 Pet 3:11-13 and Matt 19:28.

The word “new” implies a renewal of the old earth (like recycling). But that is in tension

with the second clause of Rev 21:1. There the first heaven and first earth are said to have “gone away” (Greek: *apēlthan*).

While the word “new” (Greek: *kainos*) favors the renewing of the earth rather than the destruction of the earth, Rev 20:11 seems to suggest God starts from “scratch”.

“No more sea” has caused distress for readers who love beaches, sailing, and snorkeling. But if most images in Rev are symbolic (Rev 1:1), this clause probably does not mean that there will be no bodies of water in the new earth.

In the Bible the sea is usually a negative concept (Dan 7:3; Isa 57:20; Rev 13:1). The Israelites were hill-country people. The OT doesn’t talk about the Israelites establishing a navy or being sailors.

The absence of the sea is not telling us about the geography of the new heaven and the new earth, it represents a deep spiritual truth; the absence of all that is evil, including forces hostile to God and humanity.

Rev 21:2--

In the OT, earthly Jerusalem was at the center of the eschatological hope (Isa 65:17-25, Joel 2:28 – 3:21, Mic 4:1-8. In the NT, there is mention of a heavenly Jerusalem (Gal 4:26; Heb 12:22) being prepared for us (John 14:1-3).

The “and I saw” in this verse is separated in Greek, does not indicate a strong break with verse 1. The New Jerusalem is clearly part of the new heaven and earth, even though it also plays a part in the conclusion of the Millennium (Rev 20:9).

The phrase “the holy city” is frequently connected with old Jerusalem, both in the OT (Neh 11:1; Isa 52:1; Dan 9:24-25) and in the NT (Matt 4:5; 27:53).

Jerusalem in the NT has two names, one Greek (*Hierosoluma*) and one Hebrew (*Hierusalēm*). The Hebrew name is consistently used in Rev (Rev 3:12; 21:2, 10, cf. Gal 4:25-26; Heb 12:22) with reference to the heavenly city.

While the New Jerusalem has features of the Garden of Eden, there was no city in the Garden. God resided with Adam and Eve in a garden. But in the future He will take up residence with His people in a garden city.

The New Jerusalem is the place that Jesus promised He would prepare for His disciples (John 14:1-3). It would have “many rooms”. But in John 14, Jesus does not mention a millennium or the descent of the city from heaven.

The city builders in the Bible never succeed. They are expressions of both determination and failure. But in this passage, God turns the emblem of rebellion and failure into an image of reconciliation, community, and permanence.

That the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven indicates that the world will never generate an ideal city by effort, for such a city to occur, it must descend from God.

in Revelation, there is a sharp contrast between the adornment of the New Jerusalem (Rev 19:7-8) and the adornment of Babylon, the great prostitute (Rev 17:4-5).

The New Jerusalem is adorned “like a bride”. In 21:9-10 she is the bride. In 19:7-8 the saints are the bride. The reconciliation between these two images is that a city is nothing without people. The city and the people together are the bride.

Rev 21:2 (Excursus on the New Jerusalem)--

The New Jerusalem is introduced into the narrative in Rev 21:2. Then the focus moves to the nature and the finality of the changes that take place with its arrival (Rev 21:3-8).

The annihilation of the unsaved is not as an arbitrary or vindictive action on the part of God. The rebellious would be miserable in a loving and holy universe.

In Rev 21:1-8, reference is made to the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven (21:2) and to the fiery lake and the second death, which fit better into the previous scene (20:7-15).

The New Jerusalem vision is best understood in the light of the rest of the Bible and also of Jewish and Greco-Roman understandings of cities, old Jerusalem, and ideal futures.

While the New Jerusalem is an urban context it has many parallels with the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1-3). Eden was a garden paradise and the New Jerusalem is a garden city.

The New Jerusalem is the fulfillment of the Garden of Eden. While it is not stated explicitly in Genesis, the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) seems to include a restoration of the Garden of Eden.

The story of Abram/Abraham continued the themes at the center of the Eden story. The language of promise in Gen 12:1-3 pointed back to the relationships and curses in the creation narrative of Genesis 1-3.

The curses of Genesis 1-3 were not completely reversed in the establishment of the nation of Israel. The new Jerusalem is the ideal completion of the Bible in its fulfillment of a restored Eden.

Rev 21 and 22 recalls the history of Israel, whose capital city was old Jerusalem. It was a political entity, but it could also be called the holy ("set apart") city because the nation of Israel had been set apart as a kingdom of priests.

Ezekiel's prophecy of an eschatological temple was never fulfilled, because the conditions were not met. But the prophecy was incorporated into the New Jerusalem visions of Rev 21 and 22.

Both the temple/city of Ezekiel and that of John had walls with twelve gates, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, three on each side (Ezek 48:30-35; Rev 21:12-13).

The New Jerusalem draws on three major OT backgrounds: 1) the Garden of Eden, 2) old Jerusalem, and 3) Ezekiel's eschatological temple.

The letters to the seven churches are also a structural parallel to the New Jerusalem visions. The New Jerusalem, therefore, fulfills the spiritual hopes and dreams of the church throughout the Christian age.

Within Rev there is also a major structural parallel between the New Jerusalem and the fall of Babylon visions of Revelation 17-19. Compare Rev 21:9-10 with 17:1-3.

The concept of an "ideal city" seems to have originated with Plato's *Republic* (9.13). The ideal city is found nowhere on earth, but exists as a pattern in heaven, which humans can contemplate and align themselves with.

Babylon represents earthly hopes-- the best that this world could offer. When Babylon falls, it is the shattering of all illusions and the reversal of all earthly dreams--money, sex,

power, and influence.

There is no city in the original garden. But when God makes “all things new”, He incorporates the concept of the city into the original image of paradise and redeems it.

What relevance does the vision have for a skeptical age? Everything that human beings hope for and dream about is not attained by human effort--things, achievements, who you know--but by the work of the Lamb of God.

Rev 21:3--

Instead of “and I saw” (Rev 21:1) this verse opens with “and I heard”. If John’s “heard and saw” literary pattern was intended in 21:1-4 (cf. Rev 5:5-6), the tabernacle of God in this verse is equated with the new heaven and the new earth of verse one.

The stunning reality portrayed in this text is that not only are the people of God transported back to earth in this vision, but God Himself chooses to make the journey with them. And this is not a temporary arrangement.

A loud voice from the throne could be coming from God the Father, the Lamb (Jesus Christ), or one of the four living creatures who reside “in the midst of the throne” (Rev 4:5-6).

“ . . . **the tabernacle of God is with human beings. . .**” This is covenant language, based on Ezek 37:27. What God promised to OT Israel is now fulfilled in the New Jerusalem.

The concept of tabernacle or tent sanctuary has a rich history in the rest of the Bible. The original tabernacle housed God’s living presence in the middle of the Israelite camp (Exod 25:8). That was where the glory of God was seen (Exod 40:34-35; Lev 9:23).

Tokens of the presence of God in the Israelite tabernacle foreshadowed the full presence of God with His people in the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:5; 21:22).

Rev 21:3 uses “peoples” (plural-- Greek: *laoi*) with an eye to Exod 19:5-6. Israel was called from among the nations to be the bearers of God’s blessing to the nations (Gen 12:3).

If the history of Israel is a model for the conversion of the nations in Rev, the nations being converted are seen as a whole, allowing individuals within those nations to choose not to participate in that “conversion”.

The covenant provided assurance that God’s faithfulness to Israel was never in question. In Rev 21:3, God’s faithfulness continues throughout eternity.

Rev 21:4--

In my understanding, the saved at this point have had a thousand years to recover from sin and deal with past memories and relationships. With that difficult work in the past, God can wipe away every tear.

The Epicureans believed that only death brings an end to pain and sorrow. This idea was echoed also in the writings of Plutarch. John, however, proclaims the end of death as well as the end of pain and sorrow.

The glories of the new heaven and the new earth are so far beyond human imagining that they cannot be described in positive terms. They can best be described in terms of negatives. No more death, sorrow, crying or pain.

The “former things” here are actually “first things” in the Greek. This term expresses a

sequence in time, things that come before something else.

Rev 21:5--

Likely an allusion to Isa 43:19. The Exodus story is a model for deliverance from Babylon. So, the New Jerusalem scene builds on Judah's return from Babylonian exile to rebuild the city that Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed, it was a "new" Jerusalem.

This text implies a total renovation of creation. But this is not the first time God did this. In 2 Cor 5:17 believers are a new creation in Christ, "the old has gone away, the new has come." This is a down payment on Revelation's full restoration of creation.

John's outline of what Rev's new creation might look like has many parallels with later rabbinic traditions about the new creation.

The instruction to write means these things are worth preserving for the future. Things that align with truth are always worth preserving.

In verse five, God is addressing John directly. In verse six He addresses the reader of the book with an appeal to drink from the water of life.

Rev 21:6--

This verse can be divided into three parts; 1) "It is done", 2) the self-declaration of the one sitting on the throne, and 3) a sentence about the free gift of salvation.

"It is done." A similar expression was uttered from the cross (John 19:28), there from the cross, here from the throne. Jesus' pronouncement from the cross, therefore, had eschatological implications.

When God says "It is done" it means that the change from the old heaven and earth to the new is complete. All the promises that God has ever made to the human race are now fulfilled.

The title Alpha and Omega occurs 3 times in Rev. The first time it is God the Father speaking (Rev 1:8), in 22:13 it is clearly Christ. Here the speaker is more ambiguous, could go either way.

In Plato God "possesses the beginning, and the end, and the middle of all things" (my translation-- Plato, *Leges*, 4.715e). This statement was quoted by many early Jewish and Christian writers.

In Isa 44:6, Yahweh, Israel's king and protector, calls Himself the First and the Last. This is in the context of an assertion of absolute monotheism. If Yahweh is the first and the last, there is no room for other gods.

Drinking the water of life is in contrast to drinking the wine of Babylon (Rev 14:8; 17:2; 18:4). These represent two different solutions to humanity's greatest need, one from God and the other of human origin.

Here and in Rev 22:17, readers are invited to take a free drink from the water of life. That what literally flows from the throne in Rev 22:1. Eternal life will be an ongoing act of salvation.

There was every cause in Christ that human beings should have loved Him, instead, they hated Him "without a cause" (John 15:25). There was every cause in humanity that God should

have hated the human race, yet God's love is freely offered.

Rev 21:7—

The New Jerusalem vision fulfills the repeated promises to the “overcomers” in the seven churches (Rev 2-3). This is military language, but the intended meaning is not military, it is spiritual (cf. 2 Cor 10:3-5; Eph 6:10-17; Rev 16:14-16).

The language of human inheritance is here a metaphor for the future reward of those who have placed God first in this life (Eph 1:11, 14; Col 1:12; 3:24; Heb 9:14; 1 Pet 1:4).

In 2 Sam 7:14-16 God promises an everlasting covenant to David and his descendants. One of Jesus' self-designations was as “son of David”. So the promises made to David are fulfilled in the Kingship of Christ (Heb 1:5).

The covenant language in this verse serves as a pledge from God that the coming of the New Jerusalem is guaranteed and certain.

Rev 21:8 (Excursus on Exclusion from the New Jerusalem)—

Rev 21:8 is the first of three exclusion passages in the last part of Rev (Rev 21:8, 27; 22:15, see also the list of those who “refuse to repent” in Rev 9:20-21).

Vice lists like this were also common in early Judaism and in Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Plutarch in the Greco-Roman context outside of Judaism and Christianity.

The only category of sinner that is common to all three exclusion verses has to do with falsehood. They have imbibed the character of Satan, whose essential character in Rev is deception (Rev 13:13-14; 16:14, cf. John 8:44).

Among the three exclusion texts in Rev, the greatest number of parallels is between Rev 21:8 and 22:15. The difference in the key words between Rev 21:8 and 22:15 has to do with location in the sentence.

The Greek word for a murderer is someone who ends the life of another in an unlawful way.

The Greek verb for murder is used in the Sixth Commandment, which is found in the Greek Old Testament in Exod 20:13 and Deut 5:17.

In Rev sorcery means human beings who are deliberately allied with Satan and his demonic forces. The actions of sorcery are seen as human attempts to undermine God's power and authority and are, therefore, acts of rebellion.

The NT is characterized by a total repudiation of extra-marital intercourse (Matt 19:9-10; Acts 15:20, 29; 1 Cor 6:9; Eph 5:5; 1 Thess 4:1-5). So in Rev sexual immorality is taken as seriously as murder and idolatry.

In both OT and NT idolatry is the worship of anyone or anything that is not the one and only true God. Judaism had a strong aversion to idolatry, and this aversion continued within the church.

There is one unique parallel between Rev 21:8 and 21:27. In 21:8, the category of “detestable persons” (Greek: *ebdelugmenois*) is paralleled with “that which defiles” (Greek: *bdelugma*) in 21:27.

The three exclusion texts differ somewhat in their account of the outcome of these

behaviors. Rev 21:8—lake of fire/second death. Rev 21:27—Not enter city. Rev 22:15—outside the city.

The focus in these lists is not so much the sins themselves, but the kind of people who practice them. These are not sins done in ignorance. These are sins that are loved, sins that are not repented of.

Rev 21:8—

This verse is in direct contrast with verse 7 which briefly outlines the reward of “the one who overcomes.” The “but” is followed by a list of seven categories of sinner, with an eighth (“liar”) highlighted at the end of the list.

The combination of “coward” with “unfaithful” in vice lists is unique in the NT. Cowardice was a word for general moral degradation, so it may be a summary term for all eight categories of sinner excluded from the city.

Most of us would not rank cowardice at the same level as murder or lying. But the term “coward” here is in the context of end-time tribulation. In that context, it is a serious thing to choose personal and immediate safety over faithfulness to God.

In the NT “unbeliever” came to be a technical term for someone who is not a Christian (1 Cor 14:22; 2 Cor 6:14; Tit 1:15). But in Rev it carries the more specific meaning of someone who once believed but has now left the faith.

Sulphur is a non-metallic chemical element that is extremely reactive. So sulphur burns readily and rapidly. Sulphur occurs several times in Rev before this (9:17-18; 14:10; 19:20; 20:10), always associated with fire.

Rev 21:9 – 22:5 (Introduction)—

Revelation 21:9 through 22:5 is a continuing vision, focusing directly on the New Jerusalem, which was introduced in 21:2. The standard chapter break after 21:27 is not helpful.

The symbolism related to the New Jerusalem has much to teach everyone who reads Rev. See second post at <https://www.facebook.com/jonpaulien>.

Rev 21:9--

This opens a new section in the structure of Rev by repeating almost verbatim the intro to chapter 17 (Rev 17:1). There is an intentional parallel between Babylon the prostitute and New Jerusalem as the bride in Rev.

There are four women portrayed in the book of Revelation (Rev 2:20-24; 12:1-2, etc.; 17:3-5; 21:9-11), three of them are clearly symbolic. The fourth is Jezebel, who may represent a specific leader of the church at Thyatira.

In Revelation, there are two brides of the Lamb: 1) the wife of the Lamb, who represents His faithful followers (Revelation 19) and the city, which was adorned like a bride (Rev 21:2). The bride is the city filled with the saints.

The two brides are clearly the same, even though one is introduced as a woman and the other as a city. But Rev 21:9 adds “the wife” of the Lamb, so there seems to be some progression in time from Rev 19 to Rev 21.

That the wife of the Lamb is both a bride and a city suggests that literal detail is not the primary purpose of the New Jerusalem narrative. This is not a movie of the future, it is a symbolic representation of aspects of that future.

The word Lamb (Greek: *arnion*), appears 28 (4 x 7) times in the book of Revelation with reference to Jesus Christ. The 29th occurrence of the word is applied to the beast from the earth in Rev 13:11. The latter counterfeits the former.

Rev 21:10-11--

The language here recalls the vision of Babylon in Rev 17:3-5. It also picks up the vision of the New Jerusalem exactly where it left off in Rev 21:2.

An allusion to Ezek 40:2 is very likely here. Ezekiel is transported to a visionary mountain overlooking the city and the restored temple.

This description seems to be prior to Revelation 20:9, where the city has already landed and comes under attack from “the nations” (Rev 20:8), who were deceived by Satan (20:7).

In the ancient mind, mountain tops were closer to heaven and, therefore, were ideal places to receive revelations from God and visionary experiences.

A major factor in the sin problem is that human beings fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). In the New Jerusalem, both the city and its inhabitants fully reflect the glory of God.

The radiance of the city recalls the Shekinah glory of God which graced the tabernacle (Exod 40:34-35) and temple (1 Kings 8:10-11) in the OT. It is God’s presence, rather than the architecture or materials, that make a temple a temple.

The radiance of the New Jerusalem is like jasper. In Rev 4:3, the one sitting on the throne was like jasper. This connection suggests that the New Jerusalem includes the throne room of God, the center of the universal government.

Rev 21:12-14--

This description is modeled on ancient cities. There are walls and gates for security along with watchmen on the walls. This does not make complete sense in a place where sin has been eliminated. Not to be taken too literally.

Since the New Jerusalem is the end-time counterpart of the Garden of Eden (Rev 2:7; 22:1-5), angel guards at the gates would be appropriate to the tradition (Gen 3:24, cf. Ezek 28:14-16).

The OT prophets anticipated a restored, literal Jerusalem in the ancient historical context, with all its security challenges. In the NT, the language of Jerusalem and bride is applied in a spiritual and worldwide sense to the followers of Jesus.

Ezekiel 40-48 talks about the new Jerusalem that was to appear after the exile to Babylon (unfulfilled prophecy). Ezekiel’s city was square in shape with three gates on each of its four sides (Ezekiel 48:30-34).

In Ezek 48:30-34 the tribes associated with the twelve gates of a future Jerusalem are spelled out in detail. But there are also significant differences between the tribes listed in Ezek and the listing of the twelve tribes in Rev 7.

In Ezek 48, the list is not so much the tribes of Israel as the sons of Jacob. That is why

Dan is included and Joseph replaces Ephraim and Manasseh. In Rev 7, Joseph replaces Ephraim and Levi replaces Dan.

In the Israelite encampment in the wilderness, the twelve tribes camped facing the tabernacle on all four sides (Num 2:1-2), with the tribe of Levi in the midst of the camp (Num 2:17, cf. Rev 1:5-6).

Safety and security are not the primary purpose of the gates and walls around the New Jerusalem. The twelve gates, symbolizing the twelve tribes of Israel, instead point to the full and final restoration of Israel.

Rev 21:12-14—(Excursus on the Time Sequence of Rev 20-22)--

Since “the nations” are hostile to the end in Rev 20:7-9, readers of Rev have wondered why the nations are still there in chapter 21 and welcome in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:24, 26).

While the vision of Rev 21:1-8 comes to John after the vision of 20:7-15, it is largely a description of what comes during or *before* 20:7-15 rather than after.

The New Jerusalem vision contains elements that will continue in eternity but also elements more appropriate to the situation in Rev 20.

Rev 21:12-14--

The phrase “the twelve apostles” occurs elsewhere in the Bible only in Matt 10:2. Eleven apostles are mentioned in Acts 1:26.

The foundations of the wall are associated with the apostles, but the 12 gates through the walls are associated with the 12 tribes of Israel. Jesus associated His 12 disciples with the 12 tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28, ESV, cf. Luke 22:30).

There are two possibilities related to the 12 foundations. One is that the foundations are distributed around the city, the other is that they are stacking on top of each other. In either case they are visible to view.

Rev 21:15-17--

In the OT, Ezekiel describes the measuring of the new temple envisioned for eschatological Jerusalem (Ezek 40-48). The temple of God was also measured in Rev 11:1-2, but in neither Ezekiel nor Rev 11 is the measuring stick said to be of gold.

Israel had a tabernacle so God could dwell in the presence of His people (Exod 25:8). But it was a limited presence. In the New Jerusalem vision, on the other hand, there is no need for a temple, because all will live in the direct presence of God.

The order of measuring is spelled out in verse 15; first the city, then the gates, and then the wall. But in verses 16 and 17 the city and the wall are measured, the gates are not.

Two major parallels to this text are Rev 11:1-2 and Ezek 40:3, cf. 40-48. But in Rev 11 no measurements are given and in Ezek 40-48 it is the temple rather than the city that is measured.

The concept of measuring an eschatological city in such detail offers assurance of the great care and exactness with which God secures the quality of life in the new reality.

Square and rectangular cities were common in Egypt and Mesopotamia where the

landscape is extremely flat. So, the shape of the New Jerusalem parallels the shape of ancient Babylon in Revelation.

The gigantic dimensions of the New Jerusalem are hard to square with the actual size of this planet, but it underlines the point that the future realities are far beyond what any human “eye has seen or ear heard” (1 Cor 2:9).

The prevalence of the number twelve in this account points to a cubical shape for the New Jerusalem rather than a pyramid. A pyramid has only eight edges, whereas a cube has twelve edges.

Cubits were a practical measurement about a half of a meter in length, based on the distance from the tip of the fingers to the elbow. But more importantly, 144 is twelve times twelve.

The natural reading of the text indicates a city 1400 miles tall. If the wall of the New Jerusalem is 70 meters tall, it seems grossly out of proportion. However, it is not clear if the 144 cubits indicates the height or the thickness of the wall.

Since God meets people where they are, angelic measurements would make no sense. So the angel was using human terms of measurement.

Rev 21:18-21—

The listing corresponds somewhat to the twelve gems in the breastplate of the high priest (Exod 28:16-21; 39:9-14). The privileges reserved for the High Priest are now all freely available to all God's people.

Jasper is normally understood as a reddish variety of quartz. But in Revelation 4:3, jasper stone is associated with God Himself. So even the city wall reflects the glory and the presence of God.

While the specific materials of the future Jerusalem are different than in Rev 21, the use of gold and precious stones in Tobit 13:15-18 expresses the shared vision of a new Jerusalem that far transcends the old one.

Most people are familiar with the “streets of gold” in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:21). But, according to verse 18, the entire city is made from gold that is so pure it is clear like glass.

That the streets of the New Jerusalem are of gold might remind the ancient readers of Solomon's temple, which had a gold floor (1 Kings 6:30, cf. 11QTemple 36:11; 39:3; 41:15).

While there may be a definite meaning to each of the stones in the city's foundation(s), it is only the general meaning of the whole that can be understood with reasonable certainty.

The decoration of the New Jerusalem with precious stones reminds the reader of the prostitute Babylon in Rev 17:4-5. There is also a possible allusion to Ezek 28:13. There the king of Tyre (Satan) was dressed in every kind of precious stone.

The New Jerusalem is depicted as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev 21:2). In Revelation 21:18-21, the fabulous listing of jewels suggests that the New Jerusalem is the bride of all brides.

The fact that all twelve foundation stones are listed together in this single verse suggests to me that they are stacked from John's perspective rather than scattered around the city.

There is, very likely, an allusion to the breastplate of the High Priest in this listing of precious stones. The main texts are Exod 28:15-21 and 39:8-14. The High Priest's breastplate represented the twelve tribes of Israel.

English translations of the stone lists in Exodus, Ezekiel and Revelation are all over the map, often contradicting each other. The Greek of Revelation 21 differs from Exodus and Ezekiel for four of them.

The twelve foundations of the city are constructed of diverse materials. The twelve gates of the city are all made of the same material, pearl. In ancient time, the pearl was the only precious stone that could not be improved by human skill.

There may be a deliberate contrast between the street of the New Jerusalem and the street of the great city in Rev 11:8. The great city of 11:8 was not only Sodom and Egypt, but "where also their Lord was crucified", in other words, old Jerusalem.

Rev 21:22--

There is much sanctuary imagery in the New Jerusalem vision, but there is no temple in the city. Having said this, it appears that there was once a temple there (Rev 7:15-17).

In Jewish end-time expectation, the standard view was that eschatological Jerusalem would have a glorious, eschatological temple. So the absence of a temple in the New Jerusalem after the Millennium is somewhat of a surprise.

Having a temple in the New Jerusalem would make as little sense as offering an opening prayer during a face-to-face meeting with God!

If there is no temple in the New Jerusalem, it would be because no temple is needed. Every resident of the city has daily the kind of access to God that only the High Priest on the Day of Atonement had in the Old Testament.

Like the kingship, tabernacle, temple, and sacrifices were temporary expedients that enabled God to maintain relationship with stubborn and willful humanity (Jer 7:21-23). Cf. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 364.

There is no temple in the New Jerusalem because the full presence of God himself is the temple. God and the Lamb together are the temple of the New Jerusalem (see Rev 5:12-14; 22:5).

While Jesus Himself functions as a temple in the Gospels (John 2:19-21, cf. Matt 12:6; 18:20), the idea of God being a temple is somewhat new within Judaism, but it is compatible with some ancient eschatological texts (Zeph 3:5, 15; Zech 2:10; 8:3).

Rev 21:23--

The purpose clause, beginning with "in order that" does not indicate that the sun and the moon no longer exist. They are no longer needed to provide light for the earth (Gen 1:15-16).

The language of this verse is almost certainly an allusion to Isaiah 60:19-20. "The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory."

Neither the Hebrew nor the LXX of Isaiah 60:19-20 mention “need”. But the expression is found in the *Targum of Isaiah* 60:19 (an early Aramaic paraphrase of the Hebrew), so John may be reflecting that tradition.

There is a possible allusion to Psalm 132:17 in this verse: “I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one” (NRSV). Such an allusion provides a messianic overtone to the use of “Lamb” in the book of Revelation.

Rev 21:23-26 is grounded in the prophecy of Jerusalem and the nations in Isa 60, but in Rev Jerusalem and the nations are redefined in a Christ-centered, worldwide picture.

Rev 21:24-26--

Adding “of the saved” to nations in verse 24 (as the King James Version does) may reflect John’s intention, but is not based on the manuscript evidence.

These verses are virtually a paraphrase of Isa 60:3-5 and 11, continuing an allusion that began in verse 23.

Rev 21:24-26 (Excursus on Israel and the Nations in the OT)--

In the OT prophets there is a tension between universalism and particularism; in some scenarios Israel remains the center, in others the nations are fully integrated as co-people of God.

The prophetic view of the End balances the unique role of Israel at the End with the awareness that somehow God’s plan for the future included all nations, even such enemy powers as Egypt and Assyria (Isa 19:23-25).

The process by which Israel comes to dominate the nations is a spiritual one (Zech 8:20-23). In this passage, for the nations to find God, they must go to the land of Israel.

Isa 19:23-25 seems to foretell a day when Egypt and Assyria (super powers of Isaiah’s day) would share in the mission of Abraham to bless the other nations.

Rev 21:24--

The nations are no longer behaving like those “outside the city” (Rev 21:27; 22:15). They are in harmony with the saints who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus (Rev 14:12).

The “kings of the earth” seem to be synonymous with “the nations” here, and this is confirmed by the Hebraic parallel between them in Rev 18:3.

Before this verse “glory” is always an attribute of God (Rev 15:8; 21:11, 23) or something that is directed to God or Christ (Rev 1:6; 4:9, 11; 5:12, 13; 7:12; 11:13; 14:7; 16:9; 19:1).

There is a striking tension between this verse and Rev 20:7-9 and 21:1, which imply that the old order of things, including the nations, has already “passed away”.

In the *Sibylline Oracles*, texts outside the Bible written around the time of the NT, there are strong parallels to Rev 20 and 21, but they retain the ethnic and geographical elements of the OT prophetic picture.

Rev 21:25—

The gates of the New Jerusalem will never be shut because the time for shutting them never comes. Open gates are incompatible with a city that is facing hostility and danger from outside.

That there is no night “there” suggests that day and night may continue outside the city, but the glory of God is so great that the night time in the city is no different than the day time.

Rev 21:26--

In the ancient world, “glory and honor” together represent fame and reputation. But In Isaiah 60:4-13, the glory of the nations (Isa 60:13) is material wealth. So “glory and honor” here probably have a double meaning, spiritual as well as material wealth.

Rev 21:24-26 (Excursus on The Identity of the Nations in Revelation)—

Until this point in the book “the nations” have been either hostile powers or relatively neutral. The overwhelming picture in the latter half of the book, however, is one of hostility.

Are the nations of 15:3-4 and 21:24-26 the nations “of the saved” (those redeemed out from “the nations”, as in Rev 5:9) or are they the hostile nations themselves, who will all been saved in the end?

The ethnic and geographical distinctions between Israel and the nations in Old Testament times provided a handy way of thinking about the identity of both.

In the New Testament, Israel is redefined as those who follow Jesus. The ethnic and geographical meaning of Israel has become the spiritual and worldwide church made up of the followers of Jesus.

Just as Israel is redefined in the New Testament, so too are the nations. They are now made up of anyone who does not follow Jesus.

In Acts 4:27 “the nations” of Psalm 2 are redefined as all those who oppose Jesus, both Jew and Gentile, both inside and outside literal Jerusalem.

In Rev 21:24-26, “the nations” who wanted to attack the city before being thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:7-9) are now allowed to enter freely. What are we to make of this?

If Rev 21 is after Rev 20 (in point of time), one could argue that the lake of fire (Rev 20:10, 14-15) purified “the nations” rather than destroying them.

In Rev 21:1-3 God renews the heaven and the earth. But in Rev 21:5 God says, “Behold, I **am making** all things new.” Sounds more like an ongoing process than a singular event.

At the conclusion of Rev 14 is a song of victory over the beast and his mark. The song glorifies God because all nations “will come” (future) and worship before Him. Who are these nations?

Universalism is, in fact, a very challenging concept to hold. It implies that in eternity we will have to deal with every person we couldn’t stand in this life.

How one makes sense of some theological tensions in Rev may have more to do with the experience and preferences of the interpreter than it does with the clarity of the text itself.

While I respect those who read Rev from a universalistic perspective, there are things in the text that give me serious challenges with it.

The New Jerusalem vision is actually prior to Rev 20:7-15, John is viewing the city before it lands on the earth (Rev 21:2, 10).

If Rev 21:27 actually stated that the nations enter the city out of the lake of fire, it would lend more credence to the universal perspective, but the text does not actually say that.

Since the names in the Book of Life were written before the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8; 17:8), the idea that there is a change in the contents of the Book of Life after the judgment seems to be excluded.

It seems to me that the best understanding of “the nations” entering the city in 21:24-26 is that they are the nations “of the saved”, not the hostile nations of chapters 19-20.

The nations that come to Jerusalem after the Exile are those who accept Yahweh as their ruler and serve Him. They do not include the nations who do not worship and serve Yahweh (Isa 60:10-12).

Is the “washing of robes” (Rev 22:14) an ongoing process in the context of the New Jerusalem, or is 22:14 an appeal to readers to do it now, while probation is still open?

Rev 15:3-4 is not about “the nations”, it is about the character of God. God has demonstrated to the saved that He is just (fair) and true (reliable, trustworthy).

The Greek word for “nations” is the same word often translated “Gentiles” in the NT. Because of Jesus, Gentiles were included in the church and are also included in the New Jerusalem.

I believe that Rev 15:3-4 is the fulfillment of the promise, “To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance” (Isa 45:23 ESV, cf. Phil 2:9-11).

God desires earnestly that all be saved (2 Pet 3:9). He woos and He waits so that as many as possible might have the chance to come to repentance and so be saved.

Idolatry is giving heartfelt allegiance to anything or anyone that is not God. This gradually damages and eventually destroys the image of God in a person.

The universalist view, for me, has to ignore or explain away so many Scripture texts that talk about judgment, conditional salvation, and the ultimate consequences of wrong choices.

Rev 21:27--

This is the exclusion text that has the least in common with the other two, sharing the concept of sacrilege or abomination with 21:8 and the concept of lying with both 21:8 and 22:15.

In Rev 22:14, the criterion for those entering the city is to “wash their robes”, here it is to have one’s name written in the Book of Life of the Lamb.

The language of entering in, and exclusion from entering in, the New Jerusalem can be read in a literal sense, but coming at the climax of Revelation, it is more likely a metaphor of salvation.

There is an extended meaning of “common” (Greek: *koinos*) in the NT, contrasting it to the sacred. *Koinos* in the NT is most frequently used, therefore, for “ceremonially impure” or “ritually unclean” (Mark 7:2-5; Rom 14:14).

Since Gentiles were often considered “common” or “unclean” (Acts 10:28) in the Jewish world, the use of this word here offers a striking contrast with the nations (Gentiles) who are

permitted to enter the city.

Rev 21 (Spiritual Lessons)—

The New Jerusalem fulfills the promise that the overcomers would live eternally in God's presence. This encourages the readers of the book to practice the presence of God in preparation for that time.

Rev 21 (Conclusion)—

The standpoint of both parts of Rev 21 is before the destruction of sin and sinners in Rev 20, but there are many elements in the chapter that seem to reflect a later time.