

“Eternity Now: Becoming the New Jerusalem in Our Communities”

The Question:

“Might the New Jerusalem in the book of Revelation, in its presentation as the dwelling place of God, represent not only a place for people but also a future (and a present) people who are place?”¹

I. Ninety-Five...errr...Six Theses

1. The New Jerusalem is the fulfillment of the eschatological Jewish temple-city. But it is not presented as a temple city. It contains no temple and displays very “un-city-like” qualities.
2. The New Jerusalem is presented as the eschatological fulfillment of the three “holy places” of the land of Shem: the Garden of Eden, Mount Zion and Mount Sinai.
3. The New Jerusalem is presented as the cubic “holy of holies” which extends the “dwelling of the LORD” over the entire recreated earth.
4. As the “unseen city,” the New Jerusalem may even double as the eschatological replacement for the Land itself.
5. The New Jerusalem is not just a future place but also as a future people. In other words, the First and New Covenant saints do not just live in the city; they are portrayed as being the very city itself.
6. The New Jerusalem is not just a picture of the people of God in the *eschaton* but also of the people of God contemporaneous with John’s day.

II. Jerusalem the City—Historical Background

From its capture by David in 1000 BCE till the time of Solomon it grew from just 12 acres to 32 acres. With the addition of the tabernacle, and later on the Temple, this Israelite capital city came to represent the political and religious center for the united kingdom, and for the subsequent southern kingdom.

III. The New Jerusalem as a Temple City

1. Ezekiel 40—48

- The name “Jerusalem” does not occur. The temple city is called “Yahweh is There” (יהוה אלהים שם). This emphasizes the return of God’s glory which departed the temple in chs. 8—11.
- The temple city has a square wall around the outer court of the temple (40:5) measuring 500 cubits on each side (42:15-20; 45:2). Surrounding the temple enclosure is the city wall which measures 4,500 cubits on each side. It has three gates per side with each one named after one of the tribes of Israel (48:30-35).

¹ For a fuller exploration of the New Jerusalem as eschatological symbol, including its function as counter-Imperial rhetoric, see Korner, *Reading Revelation After Supersessionism: An Apocalyptic Journey of Socially Identifying John’s Multi-Ethnic Ekklesiāi with the Ekklesiā of Israel* (NTAS14; Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020), 115–138. See also, idem, “The Ekklesiā of Early Christ-Followers in Asia Minor as the Eschatological New Jerusalem: Counter-Imperial Rhetoric?” in *Urban Dreams and Realities in Antiquity: Remains and Representations of the Ancient City* (MSHAC 375; ed. Adam Kemezis; Leiden: Brill, 2015), 455–99.

2. *Description of the New Jerusalem (1Q32, 2Q24, 4Q554-555a, 5Q15 and 11Q18)*

- DNJ is non-sectarian with an early to mid-second century BCE compositional date.
- The wall of the New Jerusalem measures 49,280 cubits/140 *ris* or stadia (east to west) by 35,200 cubits/100 *ris* or stadia (north to south) which equates to 26 kilometres (15.6 miles) by 18.5 kilometres (11.1 miles).²
- The residential area of the city has 240 residential blocks with 120 houses each totaling 28,800 homes. Each home could hold up to 22 residents. Thus, the minimal population of the New Jerusalem in DNJ was at least 633,000 people.

3. *The Temple Scroll (11QT)*

- As with Ezekiel 40—48, the name “Jerusalem” does not occur. Like DNJ, 11QTemple does not appear to be the product of Qumran sectarians due to its inclusive nature. The enemies of Israel (e.g., Egypt, Kittim, Edom, Moab, Amon, and Babylon) are depicted as also being able to worship the Lord in the restored Temple in the *eschaton*.
- The sanctuary complex consists of three concentric squares: (1) the inner court (300 cubits square); (2) the middle court (500 cubits square); (3) the outer court (1700 cubits square).

IV. The New Jerusalem—the “Non-Temple, Un-City” (Revelation 21, 22)

1. *The New Jerusalem as “non-temple”*

- Unlike the cities of Ezek 40—48, 11QTemple and DNJ, there is no temple structure within the walls of Revelation’s city (21:22).

2. *The New Jerusalem as “un-city”*

- Only one street of gold (21:21; 22:2);
- Unlike DNJ but similar to Ezekiel’s temple-city, no human residences are described in the New Jerusalem.

V. The New Jerusalem as the Restored Garden of Eden

- Garden of Eden allusions: (1) the river of living water (22:1); (2) the tree of life (22:2); (3) the removal of the Adamic curse (22:3)

VI. The Cubic New Jerusalem as the “Holy of Holies”

The wall of the New Jerusalem is a cube with each side measuring 12,000 stadia (approx. 1400 miles) (21:16).

1. *The earthly “holy of holies” as a cube*

The “holy of holies” was a cube measuring ten cubits in the tabernacle and twenty cubits in the Solomonic temple.

2. *The theological significance of the New Jerusalem as a cubic “holy of holies”*

- If applied literally its wall encompasses:
 - (1) the ideal biblical boundaries of the Land (e.g., Num 34:3-12);
 - (2) the land of Shem (1QapGen 15—21; *Jubilees* 8:12-21) along with the three “holy places” of Mount Sinai, Mount Zion, and the Garden of Eden (*Jub* 8:19);

² The measurements of DNJ are based on Alexandrian-Egyptian metrology which equates a *stadion* with 352 cubits. The Greek *stadion* measures 400 cubits.

(3) even the very city of Rome itself (a.k.a., “Babylon”) (as the crow flies).

- Thus, the cubic New Jerusalem subsumes the expanse of the original Garden to become the restored “holy of holies” which spreads “the dwelling of the LORD” to the four corners of the recreated ארץ (‘‘the earth’’).

VIII. The New Jerusalem as the Restored Land

- 4 Ezra 7:26 is unparalleled in HB or Jewish literature: “For behold, the time will come when...the city which now is not seen shall appear, and the land which now is hidden shall be disclosed.”
- The New Jerusalem of Revelation is also preexistent since it only needs to *descend*, not to be created, in the future.
 - Could the NJ be seen as the fulfillment of the hope expressed in 4 Ezra such that the NJ is not just the preexistent “unseen city” but also the preexistent “hidden Land”?
 - If NJ = “hidden Land,” then the NJ fulfills Hebrew/Jewish hopes of the restoration of God’s people to the Land, but even more significantly, AS the Land, and thus God’s people are eternally secure because they will/can never again be removed from the Land/(expelled from Eden).

IX. The New Jerusalem as the Future People of God: Symbols in Ch. 21?

1. The New Jerusalem as the bride, the wife of the Lamb (Rev 21: 9, 10)

- The Qumran community as “temple” (1QS 8.5-6)
- The Qumran community as future “city” (4QpIs^d [4Q164] on Isa 54:11)

2. The New Jerusalem as covenantal people of God?

- Twelve gates? (21:12); Twelve foundations? (21:14); Wall? (21:15-18)

X. The New Jerusalem as a Present, not only Future, People: Symbols in Chs. 4, 5?

1. A present presence in the heavenly Throne room?

- An invisible presence = the rainbow encircling the Throne?
- A visible presence = the twenty-four elders encircling the Throne?

2. Practical implications of seeing the New Jerusalem as being the present people of God

- Realized eschatology accords with John’s Gospel (supports common authorship?)
- Ecclesiology: We must “realize” our eschatology as we live out our ecclesiology.
 - Key Ministry Question: “How can God’s people BECOME the presence of God (as the NJ) into their earthly communities/neighbourhoods/cities?”
 - E.g., Abundant Communities initiative (ACE) of the City of Edmonton
 - Howard Lawrence: <https://www.abundantcommunity.com/the-abundant-community-initiative-edmonton/>
 - City of Edmonton: https://www.edmonton.ca/programs_services/for_communities/abundant-community-edmonton.aspx