

Jerusalem, New. Already in Paul and in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Jerusalem becomes an antitypical symbol for the church, the new covenant community, the “Mount Zion” which is the locus of the firstborn (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22). In the Apocalypse this theme extends to a further expression, “the new Jerusalem” (Rev. 3:12; 21:2).

In the first occurrence (3:12) one of the rewards promised to the believers in Philadelphia (3:7–13) is “the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God.” All seven of the letters of Revelation 2–3 utilize elements that speak loudly to the cultural and historical backgrounds of the immediate recipients. Philadelphia had suffered a series of disastrous

earthquakes that had bred major insecurity; and the church, small and faithful but not strong, suffered from similar feelings of insecurity. The risen Christ therefore reassures his people by promising an eminently suitable reward: they will be made pillars in the temple of God (in an earthquake zone!), the temple they will never leave, and they will be characterized by the name of the new Jerusalem, the city of God. Whatever theological value rests in this rubric, it also symbolizes in this context the ultimate hope and reward of the church, the dwelling place of God, sovereignly interposed by God and characterized by massive stability and unending endurance.

The new Jerusalem receives extended treatment in Revelation 21–22. The ultimate state of the church, and her reward, is presented under diverse metaphors: the church is simultaneously “prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband”—indeed, she is “the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (21:2, 9), and “the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (21:2). The holy city is perfectly symmetrical (21:16) and is constructed with materials of fabulous wealth (21:18–21, using language from Isa. 54:11). It shines with the glory of God (Rev. 21:11) and has foundations named after the apostles and gates named after the twelve tribes of Israel (21:12, 14). The water of life flows from the throne of God down the middle of the main street (22:1), and on each side of the stream the tree of life bears a different crop of fruit each month. The throne of God and of the Lamb is in the city (22:3); night and tears have both been banished (21:4; 22:5). Best of all, God’s servants will see his face, and that will provide all the light they need (22:4–5). The “nations” are not other than the church, since they have free access to this city that does not admit anything impure (21:24–27; 22:2); rather, the city becomes the focal point of the existence of all the redeemed in the new heaven and new earth.

The rich symbolism reaches beyond our finest imaginings, not only to the beatific vision but to a renewed, joyous, industrious, orderly, holy, loving, eternal, and abundant existence. Perhaps the most moving element in the description is what is missing: there is no temple in the new Jerusalem, “because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (21:22). Vastly outstripping the expectations of Judaism, this stated omission signals the ultimate reconciliation.

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See also CHURCH; JERUSALEM.