

The New Jerusalem

An examination of the Biblical vision of the New Jerusalem and its significance for the New Age based on the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, the Swedish mystic

By Christopher Hasler

The New Search

In times of stress and uncertainty man turns to ancient sources for inspiration. The many modern translations of the Bible are a clear indication that people are searching for deeper answers and inner peace which the materialistic philosophies have not given us.

While the Bible describes frankly the depth of human despair and examines the corrupting nature of evil, it never leaves the reader without hope, but always points the way to a brighter future. This is why the Bible has remained a source of inspiration for all times.

The last two chapters of the Bible in the book of Revelation, or as it is sometimes called, The Apocalypse, are a perfect example of this. The aged apostle John has a vision of cataclysmic events, but in the end the great conflict between the powers of light and darkness is resolved in a vision of the New Jerusalem which is a descending from God and promising salvation from evil and suffering.

While it is easy to condemn the purely materialistic demands for an ever higher standard of living, often at the expense of others, there is nevertheless an unquenchable flame in the human heart which is searching for new excellence. But each person needs to recognise that the heart is crying out for greater spirituality and not for worldliness.

The New Jerusalem

The vision which John had while "in the spirit" has been regarded as a description of the afterlife. In particular, the glorious spectacle of the holy city itself has been seen as a glimpse of heaven and a place of eternal reward. The 13th century Swedish mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg, showed that the whole Bible is written by means of correspondences and that all natural forms and symbols in the sacred writings have a correspondential significance and relate to man's mind and spirit at every age.

William Blake, who was deeply influenced by Swedenborg, saw the truth of this and realized that we have to realize the principles of the New Jerusalem down here, in our lives:

"I will not cease from mental fight, Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand, Till we have built Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land."

Swedenborg said that unless the New Jerusalem and its principles of truth are received by us now and take root in our hearts, we shall not want to accept them in the spiritual world after death.

This lecture is an invitation to the reader to consider the vision in the light of Swedenborg's insight into the correspondential meaning of the sacred architecture and symbolism. His explanation is chiefly contained in the work, "The Apocalypse Revealed". After brief quotations from John's vision, an explanation based on Swedenborg's teaching follows.

The City and the Bride

"And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as bride adorned for her husband" Rev 21:2

The two images of the city and the bride are so interwoven that it is impossible to disentangle them, which means that we should try to hold them together in our mind. John saw a city, but also a bride. The city is a

master plan for living, but an empty city can fill no one with joy. Only when men and women respond willingly can it become alive, and then there is a real "marriage" between them and the Divine Planner.

If our attention is focused on the things of God as earnestly as a bride looks with all her being towards her husband whom she loves, then we are able to enter the holy city. This pictures a completely new life in which we are no longer "single" and responsible to ourselves alone, but "married" to the One towards whom we feel a spiritual responsibility of love and obedience. The spiritual life can never be self orientated and irresponsible, for we know that we owe it to Him by whom it is given and the change from the natural to the spiritual life is as profound as entering into marriage. This is a fundamental choice which we all have to make: whether to be alone, insignificant and unwanted in the universe, or whether to receive the gift of Divine Love and the status of partnership in the creative purposes.

This latter choice brings the sense of belonging and worth in its new commitment.

"The city had the glory of God, her light was clear as crystal". Rev 21:11

If rather than translating these images into an architectural design we apply them to our own character, we realise that the human mind is the eternal city and the glory of God. This is where the inner light and clarity shine as the sense of our spirituality dawns. Everything of our personality can become translucent down to our eyes and face.

Society today educates us into hypocrisy and pretence, so that real feelings and intentions can stay secret. As a result the inner and the outer man are not in harmony, or correspondence. This has a most damaging effect on the human psyche which is living a lie. The man of the New Jerusalem, who has adopted the new pattern of life, has nothing to hide because his intentions are luminous with Divine purposes.

"The city lies foursquare, its length, breadth and height are equal" Rev 21:16

The Bible is often concerned with measurements, giving exact dimensions of the ark, the tabernacle, the temple and the city. In the different structures the same proportions and numbers keep appearing. The cube is obviously highly significant, as are the numbers 3, 7 and 12. How can all this be understood in the terms of the human mind?

We try and measure the mind by setting I.Q. and memory tests, but clearly, everything which is received and experienced by the mind builds it into a unique structure.

The purpose of our life is that through the enlightenment of true knowledge we may reach goodness of life. But because we are still in the process of becoming, our knowledge far outstrips our behaviour. We all know that smoking is bad for us, as is overeating, lack of exercise, dishonesty, unfaithfulness. Yet most of us indulge in these undesirable activities to a smaller or greater extent.

If we regard knowledge as the broadening of the mind and experience as its depth, then the person who has much knowledge but no practical application can be pictured as an oblong which is very broad but narrow in depth. The spiritual revelation tells us that the mind's principal dimensions should be equal. Our life should match our knowledge, just as our promises should be made complete by our action. To do this is to offer a "square deal".

The mind also has a third dimension, since we are not alive on one plane alone, but basically on three, comprising our awareness of the body, mind and spirit. The four squareness should apply on every level of our being, which situation can be represented by a cube.

"The city has twelve gates; on the east, north, south and west three gates each. They are never shut" Rev 21:12-13

Normally, one ought to begin with the gates, which after all, are the entrances and so represent the initiation into the city. But the Biblical style whets our appetite with the glory of *the* vision to awaken our desire to enter.

On each side there are three gates facing the four points of the compass, showing that the new spiritual Church is open to receive people of all dispositions. It is not exclusive to some chosen few. However it is

worth noting that by creation we fall into two main streams: the affectional which is represented by the east to west axis, and the intellectual which is the north to south axis.

The cardinal point on the spiritual compass is the east and this will come as no surprise to anyone who has studied any sacred architecture which is invariably "orientated" to greet the rising sun, the symbol of God's renewing love and life.

All geographical directions mentioned in the Bible are a description of our progression along the spiritual pilgrimage which is circular. We begin in the east during the innocence of our infancy when we are still close to heaven, but with development we are gradually pulled away by our selfhood in the opposite direction, and if uninterrupted by God's mercy would end in the darkness of the west. But along the way we are given glimpses of truth during the years when we are busily absorbing information. This first truth is like the northern light, cold and intellectual, but through experience and gentle influences we begin to appreciate the warmth of love within each truth. Our journey takes the southerly direction and we finally make our way back to our Creator and Father in the east, having acquired the childlike innocence of wisdom.

As the holy city is open on all sides it means that wherever we may be along this journey, provided we are sincere in our search, we can enter freely.

"Each gate was of one pearl" Rev 21:21

While the gates face all four sides, there is one unifying principle common to them all, each one is of one pearl. When we think of the slow and patient process during which a pearl is formed, we can see that the entrance into the spiritual life is a result of personal search and of overcoming the flaws within oneself and creating out of them something beautiful and precious.

Such process is closely linked with one's vision of truth and of God whose Spirit makes such growth and sacrifice possible. In the New Church that vision is centred on the personality of the risen Christ whose Humanity is the highest inspiration in man's search for goodness. Just as Christ could through temptation and suffering conquer over evil, so we too must become "pearl-makers" and learn to overcome the painful intrusions and create tranquil beauty from them. It is this endeavour in every field, the belief that goodness can triumph over evil, that leads to the holy city.

"And he showed me a pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God. On either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, yielding its fruit every month" Rev 22:1-2

The Bible is a constant reminder that: our life is a continuous Divine gift, a stream of love reaching us moment by moment. The realisation of this is important for us if we wish to see the reality of our existence: the fact that we do not live from ourselves, but draw upon that pure river of the water of life which bears us gently along. What a marvellous thought for today, when we feel so polluted by our environment!

Our needs on all levels are provided in every situation by an all seeing Providence. The tree of life bears fruit for each season. These correspondences of the Divine bounty and care are so simple, yet most reassuring, because they show that the Lord of all life understands all our needs, the lowest, as well as the highest. If we can learn to accept them without greed which is born from the fear that the Divine fruits will run out, so that we have to collect more than we need, then we shall be able to share them with all people equally. This trust in the constancy of the Divine provision will lead mankind to freedom from want and into true peace. And since at heart we all desire these things, we all have within us the capacity to become citizens of the New Jerusalem. We shall do so by translating a wonderful vision into a permanent reality in our life.

For a fuller explanation of the book of Revelation read Swedenborg's work "The Apocalypse Revealed". The three following paragraphs given an example of its depth and style:

881. Prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. This symbolizes the New Church conjoined with the Lord through the Word.

906. Its length is as great as its breadth. This symbolically means that goodness and truth in the New Church are united, like essence and form.

The length of the city Jerusalem symbolizes the church's goodness, and its breadth symbolizes the church's truth.

The length of a thing symbolizes goodness, here the goodness of the church, for the same reason that breadth symbolizes truth. The reason is that the sweep of heaven from east to west is meant by length, and the sweep of heaven from south to north by breadth, and angels who dwell in the eastern and western zones in heaven are impelled by the goodness of love, while angels who dwell in the southern and northern zones in heaven are impelled by truths of wisdom.

[2] It is the same with the church on earth, for everyone impelled by the church's goods and truths from the Word is associated with angels in heaven, and he dwells with them in the interiors of his mind - those impelled by the goodness of love in the eastern and western zones of heaven, and those impelled by truths of wisdom in the southern and northern zones of heaven. No one is aware of this, indeed, but everyone nevertheless goes to his place after death.

This, then, is the reason that length, when describing the church, symbolizes its goodness, and breadth its truth. Obviously length and breadth cannot be used to describe the church, but they can be to describe a city which symbolizes the church.

The symbolic meaning is that goodness and truth in the New Church are united, like essence and form, because we are told that its length is as great as its breadth, and, as we said, its length symbolizes the church's goodness, and its breadth its truth.

They are united like essence and form, because truth gives formal expression to goodness, and goodness is the essence of truth, and the essence and the form are united.

(Rev 21: 21). *'And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, and each one of the gates was of one pearl'*

916. [21:21](#) The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each gate was of one pearl. This symbolically means that an acknowledgment and concept of the Lord join all the concepts of truth and goodness in the Word into one and introduce into the church.

The twelve gates symbolize in sum the concepts of truth and goodness by which a person is introduced into the church. Twelve pearls also symbolize in sum concepts of truth and goodness. That is why the gates were pearls. Each gate was of one pearl because all the concepts of truth and goodness symbolized by the gates and by pearls relate to a single concept, one that is their containing vessel, and that single concept is a concept of the Lord. We say, a single concept, even though there are many that make up that single concept, for a concept of the Lord pervades all other doctrinal concepts, and so all concerns having to do with the church. All matters of worship take their life and soul from that concept, for the Lord is everything in the whole of heaven and the church, and so in the whole of worship.

[2] An acknowledgment and concept of the Lord join all the concepts of truth and goodness in the Word into one because all spiritual truths are connected, and if you would believe it, their connection is like the connection between all the members, viscera and organs of the human body. Consequently, as the soul holds everything together in their organization and connection, so that they are sensed only as a unit, so the Lord holds together all the spiritual truths that a person possesses.

That the Lord is the true door by which one is to enter into the church and so into heaven, He Himself teaches in John:

I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved... ([John 10:9](#))

And that an acknowledgement and concept of Him is the true pearl is meant by these words of the Lord in Matthew:

...the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one precious pearl, went and sold all that he had and bought it. ([Matthew 13:45-46](#))

The one precious pearl is an acknowledgment and concept of the Lord.

The Author

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