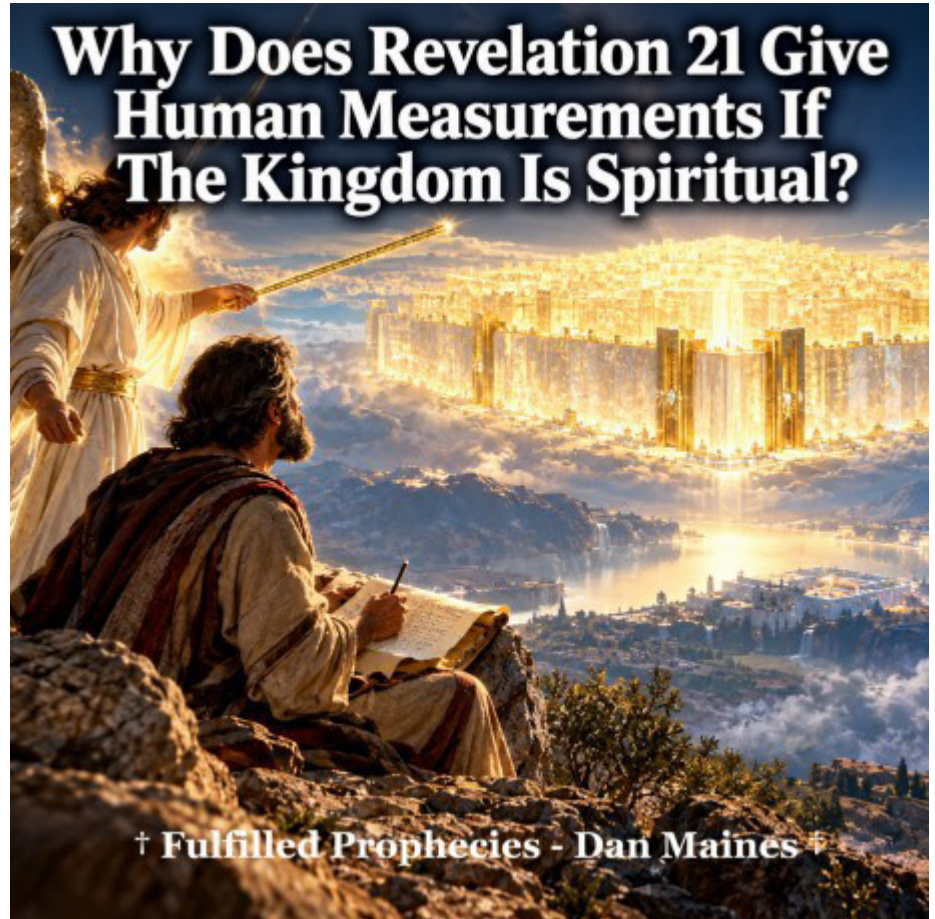


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**New Jerusalem -
Why Does
Revelation 21 Give
Human
Measurements If
The Kingdom Is
Spiritual?**



By Dan Maines

Why Does Revelation 21 Give Human Measurements If The Kingdom Is Spiritual?

Introduction

† Revelation 21 describes the New Jerusalem with walls, gates, foundations, precious stones, and enormous measurements. Because the city is measured, some assume John must be describing a future physical city that will literally descend from the sky.

† But Revelation itself identifies the city before giving its measurements. John isn't shown a construction project. He's

shown the bride, the wife of the Lamb, under the imagery of a magnificent city (Revelation 21:2, 9-10).

† The measurements don't turn the spiritual kingdom into a physical city any more than twelve gates of pearl require Christians to enter the kingdom through literal pearls.

Revelation uses visible, measurable symbols to communicate spiritual and covenant realities.

† The key isn't asking whether the numbers are real numbers. The key is asking what John says is being measured and how Revelation itself interprets the imagery.

Revelation 21:9-10

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,

† The angel promises to show John the bride, the wife of the Lamb, and then shows him the holy city. Revelation interprets its own symbol before the measurements are even given.

† John isn't told, I'll show you where the bride will live. He's told that he'll be shown the bride, and what he sees is New Jerusalem.

† The city represents God's covenant people in union with Christ. Paul likewise described the church as being prepared for Christ as a pure virgin (2 Corinthians 11:2), and he called the Jerusalem above our mother (Galatians 4:26).

Revelation 21:15-17

The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, twelve thousand stadia; its length, width, and height are equal. And he measured its wall, 144 cubits, by human measurements, which are also angelic measurements.

† John explicitly says the measurement is according to human measurement, which the angel was using. Human units make the vision understandable to human readers, but they don't require the object represented by the vision to be physically constructed.

† The numbers themselves point toward covenant symbolism. Twelve thousand and one hundred forty-four are built around twelve, the number repeatedly associated in Revelation 21 with God's covenant people.

† The city has twelve gates associated with the twelve tribes and twelve foundations associated with the twelve apostles (Revelation 21:12-14). The measurements belong to that same symbolic pattern.

† A city whose length, width, and height are equal also recalls the shape of the Most Holy Place, which was measured equally in its dimensions (1 Kings 6:20). John's city portrays the presence of God extending throughout the entire covenant community.

Revelation 21:12-14

It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on the gates, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

† The city is covered with covenant identity. The tribes are written on its gates, and the apostles are written on its foundations.

† These aren't architectural details given merely to help someone build a future city. They identify the people represented by the city.

† Paul used similar building imagery when he said believers were God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-22).

† Revelation's twelve gates and twelve foundations present the completed covenant people of God, not two unrelated peoples and not a future return to the Old Covenant.

Revelation 21:22-23

I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illuminated it, and its lamp is the Lamb.

† This is one of the clearest reasons not to force Revelation 21 into wooden literalism. John sees a city, but there isn't a temple building inside it because God and the Lamb are its temple.

† If every architectural feature must be physically literal because John gives measurements, consistency would also require a literal city that has no need of the physical sun or moon for its light.

† John's emphasis is God's presence. What the Jerusalem temple represented through physical architecture has reached its covenant reality in God dwelling with His people (Revelation 21:3).

† The New Covenant temple isn't a building made from stone. God's people are His dwelling through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:21-22).

Revelation 21:2-3

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among the people, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

† The city comes down from heaven. The movement isn't redeemed humanity leaving earth for a distant celestial city. The picture is God's dwelling coming to humanity.

† John immediately explains the significance, God's dwelling is with mankind. The emphasis is covenant presence, not geographical relocation.

† The bride imagery confirms the identity of the city. A bride adorned for her husband is personal and covenantal imagery, not a description of literal masonry.

† The promise reaches back through Scripture to God's repeated purpose of dwelling among His people (Leviticus 26:11-12; Ezekiel 37:27).

Hebrews 12:22-24

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

† The writer didn't tell his first-century Christian readers that heavenly Jerusalem was thousands of years away. He told them they had come to Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem.

† This Jerusalem is directly connected with the assembly, the New Covenant, Jesus the mediator, and access to God.

† Revelation 21 shows the completed form of the same covenant reality Hebrews describes. The earthly Jerusalem belonged to the order that was passing away, while the heavenly Jerusalem belonged to the kingdom that couldn't be shaken (Hebrews 12:26-28).

Galatians 4:25-26

Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is enslaved with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.

† Paul establishes a covenant contrast between two Jerusalems. The Jerusalem of his day corresponded to slavery, while the Jerusalem above was free.

† Paul didn't describe the Jerusalem above as a future physical metropolis. He identified it with the free covenant community.

† Revelation's New Jerusalem develops this same contrast. The

old city faced covenant judgment, while the heavenly Jerusalem represents the bride living in the freedom and presence of the New Covenant.

Revelation 11:1-2

Then there was given to me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it. Leave out the courtyard which is outside the temple and do not measure it, because it has been given to the nations; and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.

† Revelation had already used measurement symbolically before chapter 21. John wasn't merely measuring architecture. He was told to measure the temple, the altar, and those who worship there.

† People can't literally be measured as architectural structures. The act of measuring communicates divine ownership, identification, preservation, and determined boundaries.

† That provides an important interpretive precedent for Revelation 21. Measuring the New Jerusalem signifies the completeness and perfection of what God established.

† The same book that measures worshipers in chapter 11 measures the bride-city in chapter 21. Neither passage requires the kingdom itself to be physical.

Ephesians 2:19-22

So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

† Paul uses architectural language for living people. Christians are fellow citizens, God's household, a building, a holy temple, and God's dwelling in the Spirit.

† No one needs to conclude that believers physically become

bricks because Paul says they're being built together. The architecture communicates spiritual reality.

† Revelation uses the same biblical language on a grand scale. The bride becomes a city because the city represents the completed dwelling place of God with His covenant people.

† Human measurements don't make that spiritual dwelling physical. They give visible form to its order, perfection, completeness, security, and covenant identity.

Historical References

† Josephus described first-century Jerusalem and its temple in extensive physical detail, including walls, courts, gates, dimensions, and precious materials. His descriptions help demonstrate how naturally John's first-century audience would've understood temple and city imagery against the world they knew.

† Josephus also recorded the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans in AD 70. That historical setting provides an important background for Revelation's contrast between the judged city and the New Jerusalem.

† Eusebius later recorded the tradition that believers in Jerusalem departed before the war and described the disasters that overtook the city. His account reflects the early Christian memory of Jerusalem's first-century judgment.

† These historical writers don't determine the meaning of Revelation, Scripture does. Their value is in confirming the first-century historical world in which Revelation's Jerusalem imagery would've been understood.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't need to wait for a gigantic cube-shaped city to descend from outer space before we can belong to New Jerusalem. In Christ, we've come to the heavenly Jerusalem and belong to God's household (Hebrews 12:22; Ephesians 2:19).

† The glory of Revelation 21 isn't the size of its walls. It's the

reality those walls communicate, God's completed covenant dwelling with His people.

† The measurements communicate completeness, order, security, and perfection. Nothing is missing from what Christ accomplished.

† We aren't waiting for God to move into a future building. Through Christ, believers are already being built together as God's dwelling in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22).

† Revelation 21 gives human measurements because revelation communicates heavenly realities through symbols humans can understand. The measurements serve the symbol, they don't overturn Revelation's own identification of the city as the bride.

† The question is settled by John's own explanation. The angel said he would show John the bride, and he showed him New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9-10). The city is measured, but the city is the bride.

Q & A Appendix

Q: If Revelation 21 gives exact measurements, doesn't that prove the city is physical?

A: No. Revelation 11:1 measures the temple, altar, and worshipers. Measurement can symbolize God's ownership, boundaries, order, and completeness without requiring everything measured to be a physical structure.

Q: Why does Revelation 21:17 specifically call it a human measurement?

A: Because the vision is communicating through measurements humans understand. John tells us the standard being used, but that doesn't change the identity of the city that was already given as the bride, the wife of the Lamb (Revelation 21:9-10).

Q: Why is the city shaped with equal length, width, and height?

A: The shape recalls the Most Holy Place, whose length, width, and height were equal (1 Kings 6:20). Revelation expands that sanctuary imagery into an enormous city because God's

presence is no longer pictured as confined to one inner room.

Q: Doesn't a wall of 144 cubits require a literal wall?

A: Not when the surrounding imagery is symbolic. The wall belongs to a city with twelve apostolic foundations, twelve tribal gates, pearl gates, and God and the Lamb as its temple (Revelation 21:12-14, 21-22). The imagery communicates covenant reality.

Q: Are Christians living in New Jerusalem now?

A: Yes. Hebrews says believers have come to Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22), and Paul says the Jerusalem above is our mother (Galatians 4:26). Revelation portrays that New Covenant reality in its completed and victorious form.

Q: What is the strongest evidence that New Jerusalem isn't merely a future physical city?

A: Revelation identifies it directly. The angel promises to show John the bride, the wife of the Lamb, and then shows him the holy city, Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9-10). We should allow John's inspired identification to interpret John's inspired imagery.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Revelation 21:9-10; Revelation 21:15-17; Revelation 21:12-14; Revelation 21:22-23; Revelation 21:2-3; Hebrews 12:22-24; Galatians 4:25-26; Revelation 11:1-2; Ephesians 2:19-22

† Historical writers: Josephus, The Jewish War; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History

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