**God as the Φωστήρ (Light Source) of the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21.11**J. Webb Mealy, PhD (retired)

Abstract

John refers to the φωστήρ of the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21:11. This word is almost always translated by words like “radiance” and “brilliance,” conveying the idea that φωστήρ is the glow that comes from the New Jerusalem. The author of this article proves, by means of careful exegesis, that the widely-attested normal meaning of φωστήρ in ancient Greek, “luminary” or “light source,” is the only meaning justified by any ancient text, including Rev. 21:11 and the two other texts alleged to require the meaning “radiance”: 1 Esdras 8:76 LXX and Anthologia Palatina Planudea 4.11, Epigram 359 line 7. The author argues that a correct translation of Rev. 21:11 leads to the conclusion that John intends his readers to be reminded of John’s vision of God on his throne in Rev. 4:3, since in that verse he said that the Enthroned One appeared “like a jasper,” and in 21:11 he says that “her luminary [i.e. God] was “like a precious stone, like a jasper stone.” This connection in turn invites two surprising ideas: that the New Jerusalem itself is being pictured as God’s throne in the new creation (cf. Jer. 3:17), and that the “great white throne,” before which the dead—and the resurrected dead—were seen being judged in Rev. 20:11-15, is none other than the New Jerusalem itself. This insight leads to a new and theologically significant understanding of the final confrontation between God and the implacable enemies of God and the faithful.

Keywords

Rev. 21:11; Rev. 20:11; Rev. 21:9–22:5; Isa. 26:10-11; Isa. 27:1-5; Isa. 66:22-24; last judgment; φωστήρ, lexicography, BAGD, LSJ, Bible translations, biblical eschatology, New Testament eschatology, Easter eggs in Revelation; recapitulation in Revelation, the theology of eschatological judgment, new creation millennialism.

Introduction

In my 1992 monograph *After the Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20*,[[1]](#footnote-1) I argued that John clearly alludes in Rev. 21:11 to his first vision of God the Father on his throne in Rev. 4:3, hence the New Jerusalem’s φωστήρ, her “luminary,” the source of her light, is God. I argued that this is confirmed in 21:23, when John writes that “the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.”[[2]](#footnote-2) After all, the word φωστήρ is used in Gen. 1:14, 16 LXX when it is said,

And God said, “Let there be lights (φωστῆρες) in the firmament of heaven for illumination of the earth, to separate the day from the night…And God made the two great lights (φωστῆρες)—the greater light to be in charge of the day and the lesser light to be in charge of the night.”

However obvious this may seem to me, I have not found any major English translation of Rev. 21:11 that renders ὁ φωστὴρ αὐτῆς as “her luminary,” or “the source of her light,” so that it can refer to God and/or the Lamb. They all use expressions like “her radiance,” or “her splendor,” or “her brilliance,”[[3]](#footnote-3) taking φωστήρ as describing a characteristic of the New Jerusalem, namely the fact that she emits light or shines with reflected light.[[4]](#footnote-4) I also have not found any commentator in any European language, with the single exception of Austin Farrer,[[5]](#footnote-5) who agrees with me that ὁ φωστήρ αὐτῆς refers to God. As we will see below, some claim that ὁ φωστήρ refers to *the glory of God* that shines on her, and some claim that ὁ φωστήρ refers to Christ (citing 21:23), but Farrer and I seem to be alone in affirming that John means to refer to God. For reasons that will appear later, I think this conclusion is significant, so I will now endeavor to build a strong case in its defense.

When the Dictionaries Get it Wrong

Φωστήρ is a well-used word in the world of ancient Greek.[[6]](#footnote-6) It regularly refers to stars and other heavenly lights, especially the sun and moon,[[7]](#footnote-7) and it also regularly refers metaphorically to kings, philosophers, politicians, and religious teachers.[[8]](#footnote-8) It can also refer to other things that are either literally or metaphorically sources of light such as windows[[9]](#footnote-9) and people’s eyes.[[10]](#footnote-10) What it never does in any such contexts is to refer to the light that comes from the heavenly light source or from the person who is being admired as “a star” or as “a beacon.” It is the *star* or the *person* that/who is the φωστήρ, not their light.[[11]](#footnote-11) Contemporary translators of Rev. 21:11, trusting their authoritative Greek lexicons, could certainly be forgiven for rendering ὁ φωστὴρ αὐτῆς as “her radiance,” since “radiance” is listed among the word’s meanings, with Rev. 21:11 cited as an example. But what if the central reason why most major lexicons and similar authorities[[12]](#footnote-12) offer words like “brightness,” “shining,” “radiance” at the end of their entries for φωστήρ is the fact that they are following an incorrect church reading tradition that goes all the way back to the Vulgate?

The Old Latin translates φωστήρ in the normal sense:

11 habentem lumen claritatis Dei: & quod illuminat eam, simile est pretiosissimo lapidi quasi lapidi jaspidis, refulgenti in modum crystalli, “…that which illuminates it is like…”[[13]](#footnote-13)

Jerome, however, goes a different way, translating φωστήρ in a way that appears to be unparalleled in ancient Greek literature and non-literary sources:

11 Habitem claritatem Dei: lumen ejus simile…[[14]](#footnote-14) “…its light was like…"

The first translation of the whole NT into English, by John Wycliffe (c. 1385 CE), was from the Latin of the Vulgate. Although William Tyndale (1526 CE) and Miles Coverdale (c. 1535 CE) had access to Greek manuscripts of the NT, the Bible they knew was the Vulgate, and it must have been only natural for them to take Jerome’s word that φωστήρ could mean “luminosity” as well as “luminary.” And of course the translators of the Authorized Version were urged to hew as closely as possible to the English Bible translation tradition already established. So we have:

Wycliffe, 1382: hauynge the clerete of God; and the liyt of it lijk a preciouse stoon, as the stoon iaspis, as cristal

Matthew Bible, 1537, based on Tyndale, 1534, for the NT: hauyng the bryghtnes of God And her shinyng was lyke vnto a stone most precyous, euen a Iasper cleare as Chrystal

Coverdale, 1535: 11 hauynge the brightnes of God. And her shynynge was lyke vnto a stone most precious, euen a Iaspar cleare as cristall

Geneva Bible, 1568: 11 Having the glory of God, and her shining was like unto a stone most precious, as a jasper stone clear as crystal

Bishops’ Bible, 1568: Hauing the glorie of God: and her shining was lyke vnto a stone most precious, euen lyke a Iasper, cleare as Cristall

King James Bible (Authorized Version), 1611: Hauing the glory of God: and her light was like vnto a stone most precious; euen like a iasper stone, cleare as christal

Perhaps the central means by which lexicographers decide what meanings to include for their words is by reading them in as many texts as they can, and by determining, contextually, what they are most likely to mean—and what they are excluded from meaning—in each case.[[15]](#footnote-15) This is how everyone learns what words mean. But if it can be shown that proper exegesis of Rev. 21:11 favors the meaning “luminary,” then there is no reason based in that text itself for dictionaries to include any other proposed meaning. We will get into that below. For the present, I need only demonstrate, in the case of *every single other ancient text* that has been put forward by any recognized lexicon as an example of φωστήρ having the sense “radiance,” or the light that comes from or is reflected from something, that the passage makes perfectly good sense with φωστήρ meaning “luminary” or light source, and poor or no sense with φωστήρ meaning “radiance.” This is not going to be as hard as it sounds, since only two passages—apart from Rev. 21:11—have been put forward. Here they are:

1 Esdras 8:76 LXX (79 NRSV)

78 And now in some measure mercy has come to us from you, O Lord, to leave us a root and a name in your holy place, 79 and to uncover **a light** for us in the house of the Lord our God (ἀνακαλύψαι **φωστῆρα** ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ οἴκω τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν), and to give us food in the time of our servitude.

The context here is that Ezra is thanking God for his mercy in returning the people to their land and allowing them to rebuild the Temple. NRSV translators have correctly understood φωστήρ here as meaning a lamp or light source, not “radiance,” which, together with ἡμῶν, would mean “our radiance,” which is clearly not what the author intends. “A radiance for us” also makes little sense. The author imagines a divine lamp burning in the temple for the enlightenment of the people, which was hidden when Solomon’s Temple was destroyed, but unveiled again when the Temple was rebuilt.

An Anonymous Epigram[[16]](#footnote-16)

This source deserves a full quotation because it is cited by several lexicons as an example of the sense of radiance or the light that comes from someone or something.[[17]](#footnote-17)

ὦ τῆς ἁπάσης δυνάμεως ὑπέρτατε,

σῶσόν με τὸν δύστηνον ἐκ παντὸς φθόνου.

θέλεις ἀκοῦσαι, βούλομαι κἀγὼ λέγειν

τὸ γὰρ θέλημα τὴν χάριν τίκτει διπλῆν,

διπλοῦν τε κάλλος τῷ λόγῳ χαρίζεται

λέγοντι κόσμος, καὶ κλύοντι σεμνότης.

**φωστὴρ γὰρ εἶ σὺ** καὶ λόγων καὶ τῶν νόμων,

νόμοις δικάζων καὶ λόγοισιν ἐκπρέπων.

αἴλουρον εἶδον χρυσίου τὸν πρίγκιπα,

ἢ βδέλλαν ὠμήν, χρυσοκόλλητον χόλον.

O THOU who art higher than all power,

save my wretched self from all envy.

Thou wouldest hear and I, too, would speak;

for the wish gives birth to double pleasure,

while elegance on the speaker's part and gravity on the hearer's

bestow double beauty on the speech.

**Thou art the luminary** of speech and of laws,

judging by law and excelling in speech.

I saw in this prince a cat-like gold-grabber

or a cruel leech, a mass of bile set in gold.

The last two lines here are perplexing. They may be original to the epigram, revealing the entire piece as ironic, or they may be a rude addition by another pen. But in either case, it is only too clear that the author of this epigram is saying that the one addressed is “a star of words and laws/customs,” not that the one addressed is somehow, abstractly, the luminance or brightness of words and laws/customs. We have already seen (in n. 6) that it was only too normal to call people φωστῆρες, to point to their fame and power of influence. There is no reason to resist this sense in favor of one that makes little sense in this epigram.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Such is the entire list of ancient texts that supposedly support the meaning “brightness, radiance, light” for φωστήρ. Neither of them easily allows, let alone inviting, this sense. Let us now turn to Rev. 21:11. Does it really require a sense of the word φωστήρ that is different from any other ancient text?

Exegetical Remarks on Rev. 21:11

I demonstrated in my monograph *After the Thousand Years* that a central component of John’s literary method can be seen in

the extensive network of cross-references and allusions that affects the interpretation of virtually every passage in Revelation. That is, context in Revelation consists of a system of references that progressively build up hermen­eutical precedents in the text, precedents that precondition the meaning of each new passage in highly significant ways. It is thus only by placing passages and their elements correctly in the network of such precedents that they can be effectively interpreted.[[19]](#footnote-19)

To give an example, Christ’s coming in glory to judge the world is promised in Rev. 1:7, with allusions to Dan. 7:13 and Zech. 12:10, is alluded to multiple times in the letters to the seven churches, is proclaimed in Rev. 11:15-18 with allusion to Ps. 2:1-5, is announced as a wedding in Rev. 19:6-9, and is finally seen and described in a dramatic way in Rev. 19:11-21, with allusions to Ps. 2:9 and Ezek. 39:18-20.

Similarly, the New Jerusalem is first mentioned by Jesus in Rev. 3:12, with an allusion to Isa. 65:17-18, as part of a promise to the overcomers. He says that it “comes down from my God out of heaven.” Then, in 21:1-2, in the context of a new heavens and a new earth, John describes seeing “the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,” with clear allusions to Isa. 65:17-18, Rev. 3:2, and Rev. 19:7-8. This opens to a promise from the Enthroned One that “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more” in 21:4, alluding to Isa. 25:7-8. All of this prepares for a second vision of the descent of the New Jerusalem in 21:9-11. An angel says to John,

9 …“Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God, the source of its light[[20]](#footnote-20) like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. 12 It had a great, high wall... 18 The material of its wall was jasper[[21]](#footnote-21)…

Note first that it makes no sense to compare “radiance” or “brightness,” or the light that comes *from* a light source, to a gemstone. One can imagine a light-source being compared to a gemstone that sparkles, throwing off light. For example, a bright, twinkling star (which is a φωστήρ) could be compared to a “diamond in the sky.” But no one would think to compare starlight to a diamond. For this reason, it is surprising to me that the great majority of commentators seem at ease commenting on a text that they think says “her radiance was like a most rare jewel, like a jasper.”

This raises the simple question, *what is the New Jerusalem’s light source?* Several commentators, perhaps naturally resistant to the notion that God the Almighty could be compared to a costly clear gemstone, affirm that φωστήρ means luminary/light source, but say that the φωστήρ is the *glory* that shines on the New Jerusalem from God—after all, she “has the glory of God” (21:11a).[[22]](#footnote-22) But this identification will scarcely work, because, as above, God’s glory is imagined as the light that emanates *from* God, and is reflected from the New Jerusalem, and it is not itself a light source.

Another approach is to understand that φωστήρ means luminary and, by reference to Rev. 21:22-23, to identify it as Christ:[[23]](#footnote-23)

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

It is fair enough to see Christ as the luminary of the New Jerusalem, since a lamp is an example of a φωστήρ. But since “the glory of God gives it light,”[[24]](#footnote-24) then God the Father, the source of the glory-light that lights her up, is also himself equally her φωστήρ. And John very soon adds a variation of 21:23 that can be taken in this way:

And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will shine on them,[[25]](#footnote-25) and they will reign forever and ever. (Rev. 22:5)

One probably does not need to choose one option against the other. A person who knows John’s literary style well should recognize that there is no tension between the Father and the Lamb being the φωστήρ of the Beloved City. Jesus reminds Revelation’s readers that he sat down on the throne with his Father at his ascension (Rev. 3:21),[[26]](#footnote-26) and when the Father appears to judge the world, he is seen co-enthroned with the Lamb:

14 The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. 15 Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (Rev. 6:14-17)

The Father and the Lamb, co-enthroned above the icy expanse of heaven,[[27]](#footnote-27) have now stripped it away, and unrepentant sinners on earth must face them directly. The seventh trumpet scene tells the same story:

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” (Rev. 11:15)

The ambiguity as to who “he” is in the last phrase here is unquestionably intentional. They both reign, together, in absolute unity. Readers get the same effect in chapter 21:

And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new” … “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. (Rev. 21:5-6)

God the Father appears to own the self-affirmation “I am the Alpha and the Omega” in Rev. 1:8, but so does Jesus in 1:17; the promise of the water of life to the thirsty recalls God’s promise in Isa. 55:1 (cf. Jer. 2:13), but the readers have also been told in Rev. 7:17 that “the Lamb in the midst of the throne”[[28]](#footnote-28) (i.e. who is sitting on the throne with his Father) will lead the faithful to springs of living water, and John will see “the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (22:1). The Father and the Lamb, together and inseparably, are God, and can be understood to be the φωστήρ of the New Jerusalem. In the new creation, there will be one constant divine light that illuminates the whole of Mount Zion (21:9) and the New Jerusalem, to the point that the sun and moon will no longer be necessary (21:23; 22:5). John would no doubt say that this is why Isaiah prophesies that the sun and moon will be embarrassed when the One Who Is comes to judge the world and to reign in glory:

Then the moon will be confounded

and the sun ashamed,

for the Lord of hosts reigns

on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,

and his glory will be before his elders. (Isa. 24:23)

Now let us consider the question of whether it would seem somehow strange for God the Father to be compared to a gemstone. Compare these descriptions:

εὐθέως ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἰδοὺ θρόνος ἔκειτο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος, καὶ **ὁ καθήμενος** **ὅμοιος ὁράσει λίθῳ ἰάσπιδι** καὶ σαρδίῳ (4:2-3)

ἔχουσαν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ, **ὁ φωστὴρ αὐτῆς** **ὅμοιος λίθῳ τιμιωτάτῳ ὡς λίθῳ ἰάσπιδι** κρυσταλλίζοντι (21:11)

John likes to bring characters back into his narrative by referring to descriptive elements that have already been associated with them,[[29]](#footnote-29) and this appears to be a perfect example of that. If it be objected that there is something weird about the idea that John might have thought God looked like a mineral crystal, then a consideration of how he understands his visions might help clear that up. A sensitive reading of Revelation reveals the fact that John does not take literally the things he sees in his visions. He understands that realities about God’s character and God’s relationship with the faithful and the world are being conveyed to his imagination by an angelic messenger (Rev. 1:1; 22:6, 8, 16). Even Jesus himself is represented to John’s imagination by an angel, so that when the vision is over, the angel stops representing Jesus to him (cf. Rev. 19:9-10; 22:8-9). John knows well that the fantastic things that are presented to his senses are not real, but symbolic. He knows, for example, that Jesus does not literally have eyes made of flame or a sword protruding from his mouth (1:14-16). Thus it seems entirely reasonable to assume that John was aware he was being shown a paradoxical vision of the Enthroned One when he was invited to heaven in his visionary state. The image of a humanoid figure on a throne in Rev. 4:2-3 conveyed the concept of God’s rulership and authority as Creator, yet John also experienced something like a crystal flashing forth intense light and emitting awesome and incomprehensible noises like thunder (4:5). This immediately disrupted any literal understanding of the anthropomorphic image and evoked the impenetrable mystery, power, and uniqueness—the irreducible and incomprehensible transcendence—of the παντοκράτωρ, the Almighty.

Such is the case for the Enthroned One—either the Father or the Father and the Lamb in inseparable unity on their throne—being the φωστήρ that illuminates the New Jerusalem. The lexical case is solid, the literary case is solid, and the supposed drawback dissolves upon reflection. Now I want to make some exegetical expansions on this conclusion.

The Throne, the Tent, the Temple, the Light, and the New Jerusalem

The first point to make is that the combined imagery of the New Jerusalem “having the glory of God” and having the Enthroned One as her φωστήρ evokes several related imageries in Revelation and the prophets to which John regularly alludes. For example,

15 Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence (lit. “tent over them,” σκηνώσει ἐπ᾽ αὐτούς). 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. 17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (Rev. 7:15-17)

2 In that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious... 5 Then the Lord will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy (*ḥuppāh*). 6 There will be a booth (*sukkāh*) for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm (*ûləmaḥăseh ûləmistôr mizzerem*)…(Isa. 4:2, 5-6)

God’s glory itself is imagined as a protective shroud or shelter. This phraseology is reprised in Isaiah 25, as the prophet praises God in response to the promise in Isa. 24:21-23 that God is going to remove the wicked from the earth and reign in glory on Zion:

O Lord, you are my God;

I will exalt you; I will praise your name,

…

For you have been a stronghold to the poor,

a stronghold to the needy in his distress,

a shelter from the storm (*maḥăseh mizzerem*) and a shade from the heat;

for the breath of the ruthless is like a storm (*kəzerem*) against a wall… (Isa. 25:1, 4)

This tells us that Isaiah understands “the storm” from which God’s protective presence will shelter the faithful in the glorious kingdom is the attacks of the wicked. This idea will be elaborated after Isaiah describes the great banquet for all nations in Isa. 25:6-10a:[[30]](#footnote-30)

1 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:

“We have a strong city;

he sets up salvation (*yəšûʿāh*) as walls and bulwarks.

2 Open the gates,

that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in.

3 You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you,

because he trusts in you.” (Isa. 26:1-3)

According to the picture being painted here, it is God’s salvation, God’s protective saving action, that will serve as the walls and fortifications of the Jerusalem of God’s glorious kingdom. It is therefore striking that John not only says that the Enthroned One, “like a jasper,” lights up the New Jerusalem with glory, but that *the walls of the New Jerusalem are made of jasper* (Rev. 21:18).[[31]](#footnote-31) In John’s description, which is clearly symbolic, an allusion to God’s protection as the walls of eschatological Jerusalem in Isa. 26:1b seems very likely,[[32]](#footnote-32) especially since Rev. 21:23, speaking of the City’s lack of need for sun or moon, will allude to Isa. 24:23 (cf. 60:19-20), and Rev. 21:25, in speaking of always-open gates, through which only the righteous will enter, will allude to Isa. 26:2 (cf. Isa. 60:11). From all of this, astute readers of Revelation will realize that the temple of the New Jerusalem, which *is* God and the Lamb (Rev. 21:22), and whose holy of holies is the golden, cubic New Jerusalem itself (Rev. 21:16, 18),[[33]](#footnote-33) is also the tent of God’s intimate presence that will shelter the faithful (Rev. 7:15; 21:3; cf. 13:6; 15:5). The symbols are converging.

How, then, does the throne of God (and the Lamb) fit into this symbolism and imagery? I have observed elsewhere that God’s throne is the central visual symbol of Revelation.[[34]](#footnote-34) But in chs. 21 and 22, the throne is not clearly localized. Gone is all mention of the vision elements previously associated spatially with the throne in heaven: the four living creatures (4:6, 8, 9; 5:6, 8, 11, 14; 6:1, 6; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4), the 24 elders (4:4, 10; 5:5, 6, 8, 11, 14; 7:11, 13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4), the lampstand (4:4), the sea (4:6), the altar of sacrifice (6:9; 9:13; 11:1; 14:18; 16:7), the curtain (6:14; 11:19), the incense altar (8:3-5; 9:13), and the ark of the covenant (11:19). If the throne is not pictured as being located anywhere in particular in the New Jerusalem, and the Enthroned One is imagined as the φωστήρ that casts glory-light brighter than the sun on the whole City, does that not suggest that the entire City functions as God’s throne in the new creation—that it will be the seat of God’s rule in the glorious kingdom? This makes sense in terms of what John sees, because he sees God symbolically atop his throne in Rev. 4:3-4 as though he is seeing a flashing jasper jewel, and in Rev. 21:11 he sees that God is the all-illuminating jasper-like φωστήρ above the New Jerusalem. This also makes good sense conceptually, because the throne symbolizes the place of the full expression and implementation of God’s authoritative will for creation. Jesus teaches his followers to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven” (Mt. 6:10 || Lk. 11:2). In the new creation, the beloved community, the New Jerusalem,[[35]](#footnote-35) will be the locus of the fulfillment of this prayer—the redeemed community on earth will embody the fulfillment of the symbol of the throne of God. Jeremiah indeed prophesies of a time when

they shall no more say, “The ark of the covenant of the Lord.” It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not be made again. 17 At that time *Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord*, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the Lord in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart. (Jer. 3:16b-17; cf. Jer. 17:12)

Pushing this identification too inflexibly in Revelation can lead to snags—for example, John says in Rev. 22:3 that “the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it.” How can the throne be “in” the New Jerusalem, while also being identical with it? On the other hand, John sees the spring of the water of life, which becomes “the river of life coming out of (ἐκπορευόμενον ἐκ) the throne of God and of the Lamb in Rev. 22:1.”[[36]](#footnote-36) Is not Mount Zion itself the place where any artesian spring must be imagined to come forth? Perhaps Mount Zion, the “great, high mountain” (ὄρος μέγα καὶ ὑψηλόν) upon which the New Jerusalem will be sited (21:10), is to be imagined as the great, high throne of God and the Lamb in the new creation. On this theme, the pseudepigraphic *1 Enoch*, beloved of first-century Jews and Christians alike, speaks of the eschatological or mystical mount Zion as “the throne of God, which is of alabaster and whose summit is of sapphire” (*1 En.* 8:8; cf. Ezek. 1:26; 10:1).[[37]](#footnote-37) And in the canonical psalms we have this:

For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his *dwelling place* (or *his throne*, Heb. *môšāb*).[[38]](#footnote-38)

This is my resting place forever; here I will *dwell* (or *sit enthroned*, Heb. *ʾēšēb*),[[39]](#footnote-39) for I have desired it. (Ps. 132:13-14; cf. Ps. 68:16)

What is to be made of all this? There is a particular destination that I am driving towards: I think John would like for astute readers/hearers of Revelation to begin wondering, as they encounter the glory-bathed New Jerusalem in Rev. 21:11, and her φωστήρ, what it might have meant when John had recently described God’s throne as great and white (θρόνον μέγαν λευκόν) in 20:11. What if, in John’s vision of the great judgment of the dead, he was not describing a throne off in some abstract space, but rather, Zion/the New Jerusalem as God’s great, glory-shining throne coming to earth? His allusion to God’s appearance on his throne in Rev. 4:4 as “like a jasper,” combined with the presumed position of God as φωστήρ immediately above the City in 21:11, would surely be encouraging of this leap of imagination. And this would not be the first time in Revelation that John had placed what I call an “Easter egg” in his text—an element whose meaning would intentionally remain mysterious until a specific later point in the text, at which point it would take on a great deal of significance. For example, in Rev. 2:28 Jesus promises to give the overcomer “the morning star,” which remains mysterious until Rev. 22:16 when he announces, “I am the bright morning star.” The wondrous surprise is that he has promised *himself* to the overcomer! In another example, John says in Rev. 1:1 that Jesus sent his angel to give John the revelation of Jesus Christ, and the reader only finds out in Rev. 19:10 and 22:8-9 that the angel has even *represented Jesus visually and experientially to John’s imagination*, a rather startling radicalization of the role. There is yet another Easter egg in Rev. 3:12, which only pops open when one reads Jer. 23:6 and 33:16: the names of the New Jerusalem and the name of “my God” and “my own new name” turn out to be one and the same name, which any believer would love to have written on their forehead: *yhwh ṣidqēnû*, “The Lord is our righteousness.” This also retrospectively suggests that the seal that the 144,000 have applied to their foreheads (Rev. 7:3-4) is probably that exact protective inscription.

The Φωστήρ and Protector of the New Jerusalem   
and the Last Judgment

Recognizing that John wants his readers to think of the vision of the Enthroned One upon reading Rev. 21:11 leads to the possibility of a radically unconventional reading of Rev. 20:12-15. In this reading, Rev. 20:12 recapitulates Rev. 20:4-5, and Rev. 20:13-15 recapitulates Rev. 20:7-10. John’s vision of the judgment of the dead according to their works in mortal life, “by what was written in the books, according to their deeds” (ἐκ τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν τοῖς βιβλίοις κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν, Rev. 20:12), becomes recognizable as a second vision of the same judgment John saw (with focus on the faithful) in 20:4 at the inauguration of the thousand years. Correspondingly, when John sees the dead being resurrected before the great white throne and being judged by their deeds (yet again κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν, 20:13) and being cast into the incinerating lake/pool[[40]](#footnote-40) of fire (λίμνη τοῦ πυρός, 20:14-15; cf. 20:10), and he interprets this as “the second death” (cf. 20:5-6), this becomes recognizable as a second vision, in courtroom imagery, of the resurrection of the non-citizens of the New Jerusalem, their attempt to commit violence upon it, and their incineration in consuming fire from God. In this recapitulatory reading, the picture in Rev. 20:11-15 comes into full alignment with the Old Testament prophetic picture of the final encounter between God and the implacable enemies of God and the faithful.

Not only Isa. 66:22-24, to which Jesus alludes every time he mentions gehenna (esp. Mk 9:47-48), but also Isa. 26:10-11, quoted in Heb. 10:26-31, and Rev. 20:9, picture the total supernatural incineration of would-be attackers of the community of the faithful in the context of the glorious kingdom—in Isaiah 66 this would-be attack occurs in the explicit context of “the new heavens and the new earth.”

This reading works well within the interpretative model known as new creation millennialism. In new creation millennialism, the coming of the Father and the Lamb in glory to judge the world is understood to be revealed both as a confrontation/battle (6:12-17 || 11:15-19 || 19:11-21) and as a courtroom scene (11:15-18 || 20:4-6). The radical dissolution of the current form of the cosmos that John describes in Rev. 6:12-17 precludes any unrepentant mortals surviving the world judgment to take part in the thousand years (cf. Rev. 16:18-21 || 19:17-21), and implies that the establishment of the new creation will take place immediately afterwards, to ready the cosmos for the reign of Christ and the faithful.[[41]](#footnote-41) This makes perfect sense because after John is told in Rev. 19:6-9 that the time for the great wedding between Christ and his faithful has come, John sees the New Jerusalem, in the context of the new heavens and earth (Rev. 21:1), coming down from heaven “prepared like a bride for her man” (ἡτοιμασμένη ὡς νύμφη κεκοσμημένη τῷ ἀνδρὶ αὐτῆς, 21:2), and an angel calls her “the bride, the Lamb’s woman” (ἡ νύμφη ἡ γυνὴ τοῦ ἀρνίου, 21:9).[[42]](#footnote-42) It makes no sense at all that the wedding,[[43]](#footnote-43) announced as imminent immediately before John’s vision of Christ’s coming in glory in 19:11-21, should be imagined as still yet to occur a thousand years later. As Rudolph Schnackenburg puts it,

The Church awaits her Lord until the Parousia, but then all her yearning is assuaged. No room is left for an interval of rule between the Parousia (19.11 seq.) and the marriage of the Lamb (19.7, 9; 21.2).[[44]](#footnote-44)

This means that the thousand years take place *after* the new creation and *after* the coming to earth of the New Jerusalem, and that “Gog and Magog” are not mortals who miraculously survived the disruption of the whole cosmos and the transition to a new creation. They are instead to be recognized as “the rest of the dead,” whom John said would remain in the underworld prison of Hades (cf. 1:17-18) for the same length of time that the devil would remain imprisoned in the abyss, namely, “until the thousand years were ended” (ἄχρι τελεσθῇ τὰ χίλια ἔτη, the identical phrase in 20:3, 5). When we consider the intimate and intentional intertextual relationship between Revelation and the Isaiah Apocalypse (Isa. 24–27), it becomes unmistakable that John intends Rev. 19:19–20:3 to be read against the backdrop of Isa. 24:21-23, and Rev. 20:7-10 to be read against the backdrop of Isa. 26:10-11 and 27:1-5. In John’s narrative of the end, the unrepentant are judged and found unworthy of a place in the glorious kingdom of Christ and the faithful (Rev. 11:18 || 20:4, 6), and are sentenced to co-incarceration with the devil (and presumably his fellow rebel angels) in the underworld for a thousand years (Rev. 20:5).[[45]](#footnote-45) They are then released on parole at the same time as the devil is released (20:7-8), but immediately fall back into deception and temptation, and they re-offend, making theirs “a resurrection of judgment” (20:9-10; cf. Jn 5:28-29). It is their breach of parole, the proof of their recidivism, that leads to their irrevocable expungement from the creation, their “second death” (20:6, 13-15). They stood before Christ’s and his Father’s great white throne for judgment for their deeds as mortals at Christ’s coming in glory (Rev. 20:4 || 20:11-12 || Dan. 7:9-10), and they stood before it again when they had paid the penalty decreed for them for their unrepentant ways in mortal life and had been released on parole. But this time the death penalty they faced was irrevocable (Rev. 20:7-10 || 20:13-15).

Conclusion

The above reading of the story of the “end” in Revelation not only makes better narrative sense than any other, picking up on John’s detailed textual clues to the presence of recapitulation and to intertextual links to the Isaiah Apocalypse, but it also reattaches[[46]](#footnote-46) John’s courtroom-style “last judgment” story in Rev. 20:13-15 to the story of the end of the implacable enemies in classic Old Testament prophetic texts such as Isa. 26:10-11, 27:1-5, and 66:22-24. The last judgment of the unrepentant is thus a judgment of their deeds done in resurrection. I have presented a full case for these elements of the new creation millennialism interpretative paradigm in my monographs *After the Thousand Years* and *New Creation Millennialism*,[[47]](#footnote-47) but I think and hope that a correct understanding that John is referring to God as the jasper-like φωστήρ of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:11 || 4:3) might add a modicum of further evidence in its favor. The New Jerusalem, lit up with the glory of God, its φωστήρ, and having walls made of God’s own protective power, invites recognition as God’s great, white throne, the place of the final confrontation between a God of grace and reconciliation and created beings intent on remaining in enmity (Isa. 27:1-5; 57:14-21). The proof presented here that φωστήρ always means *luminary* and never means *radiance* stands equally solid, no matter what one makes of new creation millennialism.

1. J. Webb Mealy, *After the Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20* (JSNTSup 70; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A few older/traditional translations (e.g. KJV, NKJV, ASV) have “her light,” which, despite being ambiguous, does not invite the reader to imagine a light that shines on her, but rather a light that she emits or reflects. My own translation, *The Spoken English New Testament* (Seattle: Amazon, 2022), is the single exception. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Among the numerous major translations made into 14 modern European languages, the only ones that read φωστήρ as “luminary,” rather than “radiance,” are, in Russian, the Church Slavonic, followed by SYN (the Russian Synodal Bible), CAS (Cassian Translation of the NT), and ELZM (Elizabethan Bible in Russian, a translation into Church Slavonic in modern spelling), which have Светило, a luminary, and in French, BAN11 (La Bible Annotée Neuchâtel), and BCC11 (La Bible Catholique Crampon) in French, which have, respectively: “son luminaire est semblable à une pierre très précieuse,” i.e. “its luminary is like a very precious stone,” and “et l'astre qui l'éclaire est semblable à une pierre très précieuse, ,” i.e. “and the star which illuminates it is like a very precious stone.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *The Revelation of St John the Divine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 216 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. A search of the TLG database brings up over 1100 hits. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Among the passages that come up in a TLG database search for φωστήρ, the words ἥλιος, ἡλιακός, σελήνη, and σεληνικός come up hundreds of times. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. E.g. Nikolaos Eirenikos, Poem V, in which the choir calls forth the king, calling him, Χαίρε, φωστήρ, ἐξέλαμψας, χαίρε, φωστήρ, ἐφάνης, in Wolfram Hörandner, “Court Poetry: Questions of Motifs, Structure and Function,” in *Rhetoric in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-fifth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, University of Oxford, March 2001* (ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys; Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies Publications, 11; Aldershot, England; Ashgate, 2003), 75-85 (80); NT apocryphon *Acta Xanthippae et Polyxenae* (~III/IV) 6.1 calls Paul the apostle κῆρυξ καὶ διδάσκαλος καὶ φώστηρ τῆς οἰκουμένης; Clement of Alexandria*, Protrepticus* 6, praises the Pythagorians for describing God as “…the light of all his works in heaven and the father of all things,” ἔργων ἁπάντων ἐν οὐρανῷ φωστὴρ καὶ πάντων πατήρ; Theodoret refers St. Basil the Great as ὁ τῆς οἰκουμένης φωστήρ (Hist. Eccl. 4.19.1). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Hesychius Lexicographus of Alexandria (IV–V CE) has in his Greek dictionary for the word φωστήρ, the single word θυρίς, i.e. a window. Note that, as relates to a room, a window is a light source, not a radiance, and not light as such. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Vettius Valens, *Vettii Valentis Anthologiarum Libri* (ed. W. Kroll; Berlin: Weidmanns, 1908), p. 110 l. 22, cited as Vett. Val. in lexicons. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. If φωστήρ were naturally susceptible of meaning the light that comes from something/somebody, then among the 1100+ instances, it is to be expected that one would find the expression φωστὴρ αὐτῶν/αὐτοῦ, “their/his/its φωστήρ.” TLG contains no such instance. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. E.g. Le Grand Bailly, Robinson, Grimm–Wilke–Thayer, Ebeling, Friberg–Friberg–Miller, LSJ, BAGD, Spiq. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. From Bibliorum Sacrorum Latinæ versiones antiquæ; seu, Vetus Italica, et cæteræ quæcunque in codicibus mss. antiquorum libris reperiri potuerunt: quæ cum Vulgata Latina, cum textu Græco comparantur (ed. Peter Sabatier; Paris: Franciscum Didot, 1751), III, 1032 Accessed online 2/16/2024 at https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433004953075&seq=1074 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. When in doubt, one can of course resort to other methods such as etymological theory and drawing inferences from cognate words in related languages whose meanings are known. On this, see D.J. Pring, *Lexicography: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000); Philip Durkin (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Lexicography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Anthologia Palatina Planudea*, vol. 4 Book 11, Epigram 359 line 7, from *The Greek Anthology, with an English Translation by W. R. Paton* (LCL, 85; London: William Heinemann, 1926), IV, p. 240 (Greek), p. 241 (English). Accessed online on 2/15/2024 at

    https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015003878918&seq=250 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. E.g. Grimm–Wilke–Thayer, BADG, Ebeling. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Indeed, Le Grand Bailly (Bailly, Anatole, *Dictionnaire grec–français* [Paris: Hachette, 1935], 2112, *s.v.* φωστήρ) cites this source as an example of the first meaning, “ce qui donne la lumière, ce qui illumine,” applied in a figurative sense. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *After the Thousand Years*, 13, footnoting for comparison E.S. Fiorenza, ‘Composition and Structure of the Book of Revelation’, *CBQ* 39 (1977), 344-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. ESV her radiance. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. ESV The wall was built of jasper. Gr. ἡ ἐνδώμησις τοῦ τείχους αὐτῆς ἴασπις. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. E.g. Friedrich Düsterdieck, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (KEK, 16; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1865), 566, English trans. *A Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John* (trans. H.E. Jacobs; New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1887), 479; William Hendrickson, *More than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1962 [1939]), 203; Drew N. Grumbles, *YHWH Is There: Ezekiel's Temple Vision as a Type* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021), 209 and nt. 185; Pierre Prigent, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean* (CNT, Deuxième Série, 14; Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1981), *in loc.*; Beale, *Revelation*, 1066. See also Edward Robinson, *A Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament* (rev. edn; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1850), 774: “Meton. brightness, shining, spoken of the divine glory, δόξα, Rev. 21,11…”; Michael G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Smyth & Helwys Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2001), 406; Pilchan Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: A Study of Revelation 21-22 in the Light of its Background in Jewish Tradition* (WUNT, Riehe 2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 286: “The jasper in v. 11 (cf. vss. 18-19) is reminiscent of the description of the divine appearance on the throne in Rev. 4:3.” From this he concludes that the church shares God’s character, taking ἡ φωστήρ αὐτῆς as meaning her glow with God’s glory. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. This view goes all the way back to the first Greek commentator on Revelation, Andreas of Caesarea, who comments, φωστὴρ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὁ χριστός; so also Primasius (fl. 551), who says, eum Christo relatum uelit intellegi, de quo beatus Petrus: Lapidem inquit angularem pretiosum (alluding to 1 Pet. 2:6); Oecumenius (6th-7th century CE), who says, ὁ φωστὴρ αὐτῆς φησι, τουτέστιν ὁ τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἥλιος Χριστός [cf. Mal. 4:2]. Cf. Césaire d’Arles (writing in Latin, d. 542 CE), *Commentaire de l’Apocalypse de Jean* (ed. Roger Gryson; SC, 68; Paris: Cerf, 2023), 264, 276. It seems that Césaire is referring to the glory of Christ rather than Christ himself: *in illo lapide Christi claritas demonstrator*. Among modern commentators who say Christ is the φωστήρ, see e.g. Friedrich Jakob Züllig, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*. II. *Erklärung von Kap. IV–XXI* (Stuttgart: E. Schweitzerbarts, 1840), 426; Johann Peter Lange, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical, with Special Reference to Ministers and Students*. NT X. *The Revelation of John* (trans Evelina Moore; ed. R.R. Craven; New York: Scribner, Armstrong, & Co., 1874), 882; Hendrikson, *More Than Conquerors*, 203 (ambiguous); Edmondo F. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John* (trans. M.P. Johnson and M. Kamesar; Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006 [Italian edn 1999]), 336, 348; Ugo Vanni, “La dimension christologique de la Jérusalem nouvelle,” *RHPR* 79 (1999), 119-33 (123). H.B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John* (London: Macmillan, 1906), 281, reading as a postmillennialist, says that the luminary of the Church is “her witness to Christ,” which makes little sense. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. ἡ γὰρ δόξα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐφώτισεν αὐτήν, a gnomic or constative aorist. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. ESV be their light. Gr. φωτίσει ἐπ᾽ αὐτούς. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Jesus calls himself “the Son of God” once in Revelation (2:18), but John and other characters in his visions call him “the Lamb” 25 times, keeping the focus on his identity as the redeemer who gave his life up as a sacrifice. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. This is the *rāqîʿa*/στερέωμα of Gen. 1:6; Exod. 24:10; Ezek. 1:22, 26; 10:1, Rev. 4:6; etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Gr. ἀνὰ μέσον τοῦ θρόνου. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. E.g. 4:1, cf. 1:10; 12:5, cf. 2:27; 19:11, cf. 3:14; 19:12, cf. 1:14; 19:15, cf. 1:16; 20:11, cf. 6:14-16; 21:2, 10, cf. 3:12; etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Cf. Isa. 25:4-8; Rev. 7:16-17; Rev. 21:3-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Cf. Isa. 54:12, LXX, which says God will make Jerusalem’s battlements of jasper (καὶ θήσω τὰς ἐπάλξεις σου ἴασπιν). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Cf. Mounce, *Revelation*, 378-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Cf. 1 Kgs 6:20; 2 Chron. 3:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. *After the Thousand Years*, 143. God’s throne is mentioned 39 times in Revelation. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See Robert H. Gundry, “The New Jerusalem: People as Place, Not Place for People,” *NovT* 29 (1987), 254-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Cf. Rev. 7:17; Ps. 46:4; Jer. 2:13; 17:13b; Ezek. 47:1; Zech. 14:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. E. Isaac, “1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch,” in James Charlesworth, ed., *The Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament Volume One: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983 [orig. pub. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 5-90 (23). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. The noun in v. 13, *môšāb*, dwelling place, comes from the root *yšb*, source of the verb *yāšab* and the first-person imperfect*ʾēšēb* in v. 14. The words *môšāb lô* could be translated as “his seat” or even “his throne.” Cf. Psa. 1:1, which blesses the person who does not sit (*yāšab*) in the seat (*môšāb*) of the seat of scoffers. Similarly, see Ezek. 28:2, in which the prince of Tyre boasts that he sits (*yāšab*) in the seat (*môšāb*) of the gods. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. The verb *yāšab* is the verb often used in the psalms to refer to God’s relationship to his throne— *yāšabtā ləkissē šôpēṭ ṣedeq*, you have sat on the throne, giving righteous judgment (Ps. 9:4); ʾ*ĕlôhîm yāšab ʿal-kissēʾ qodšô*, God sits on his holy throne (Ps. 47:8). See also Ps. 9:7, 11; 29:10; 99:1; 102:12; 113:5; 123:1, for uses of *yāšab* that convey the idea of God’s enthronement but do not use the word throne (*kissēʾ*). In John’s mind, the first words of Rev. 21:5, καὶ εἶπεν ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ, would naturally have been heard in Hebrew as *wayyōʾmer hayyōšēb ʿal-kissēʾ.* [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. LSJ first definition of λίμνη is “a pool of water left by the sea or a river.” It is easy enough to picture the “river of fire” that comes from the throne of God in Dan. 7:9-11 going forth to inundate and incinerate the fourth beast (cf. Rev. 19:20). Similarly, in reading Rev. 20:9, one can easily imagine that the deluge of fiery destruction, which comes down from heaven, forms an inundating and incinerating pool around not only them but the devil (20:10). As an angel he might be imagined to be able to flee the descending mass of fire, but he is captured and cast into it. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. This aligns with the teaching of Jesus (Mt. 19:28), Paul (Rom. 8:19-23), and the author of 2 Peter (2 Pet. 3:5-14). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. I use the words “man” and “woman” here because the usual translation of γυνή as “wife” could lead to the false idea that John thinks he is seeing something that happens after the thousand years, when the New Jerusalem has already been married to Christ for a thousand years and is thus his long-established “wife.” No such inference is invited by John’s words. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Jesus pictures himself as the Messianic groom and his coming in glory as a wedding (Mt. 9:15; 22:1-14; 25:1-13; Mk 2:19-20; Lk. 5:34-35; 12:35-36; Jn 3:29); Paul also uses this figure (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25b-32). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. *God’s Rule and Kingdom* (trans. J. Murray; London: Nelson, 1963), p. 346. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. “Hades” (Gr. ᾅδης, Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 15; cf. Mt. 11:23; Lk. 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31) and “the abyss” (Gr. ἄβυσσος: Rev. 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3; cf. Lk. 8:31; Rom. 10:7) can both equally refer to the underworld where dead people are conceived of as being trapped (Rom. 10:7; Rev. 11:7; 17:8). On the other hand, angelic/demonic spirits including the devil are always spoken of as trapped in the abyss, and not Hades. The distinction seems to be terminological rather than cosmological. The spirits of the dead and the rebellious angelic spirits are sent to the same place. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. The Old Testament picture of the last encounter between God and the irreconcilable enemies of the community of the faithful is, in all familiar popular conceptions of the final fate of “the wicked,” jettisoned in favor of a courtroom scene set in an abstracted zone somewhere not on earth. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Seattle: Amazon, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)