New Jerusalem = Jerusalem definitively restored

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Introduction

Having established that the New Jerusalem is a present reality, we will now examine the Old Testament (OT) background to John's vision.

When the OT prophets address Israel and Judah, two themes stand out: Judgment and Restoration.
Threats of judgment are followed by promises of final restoration.
Judgment generally takes the form of foreign invasion, conquest and exile.
Restoration usually looks well beyond the current historical context all the way to messianic times.
In other words, restoration promises generally look beyond the nation's return from Assyro-Babylonian captivity to the definitive restoration under the Messiah.

Old Testament prophecies find their definitive fulfillment in New Testament times:
Prophecies of judgment on Israel were finally fulfilled in the Tribulation of 66-70 AD (Mt 24:21; Lk 21:22).
Prophecies concerning the Messiah were fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus (Lk 24:25-27, 44).
Prophecies of restoration and the kingdom were also fulfilled by AD 70 (Lk 21:31; Ac 3:21-24; Rev 10:7).

John's final vision depicts the definitive restoration of Jerusalem — as foretold by OT prophets and now accomplished through the work of Jesus.
His vision draws especially on the restoration prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel.
It's these that we shall examine here.

Isaiah's Restoration Prophecies

Isaiah 1:1 – 2:4

Isaiah indicts Jerusalem and calls her "Sodom" and a "harlot" (Isa 1:10, 21, ASV).
But God will purge her of evildoers; she will again be called "the city of righteousness, the faithful city" (Isa 1:26).
In the "latter days", restored Jerusalem will become a worship center for the nations (Isa 2:1-4).[1]

This pattern is replicated in Revelation:
Old Jerusalem is called "Sodom" (Rev 11:8) and a "harlot" (Rev 17:1, 5, 15-16; 19:2, ASV).[2]
The city is judged (Revelation 18).
The New Jerusalem that takes her place is a "holy city", a faithful bride (Rev 21:2, 9-10).
Evildoers are excluded (Rev 21:27; 22:15).
Only those washed clean through Christ are admitted (Rev 22:14; cf. 7:14).

Isaiah 54:11-12

Zion's restoration after exile:
God himself will rebuild the city with precious stones — its foundations, battlements, gates and walls.
This is echoed in the New Jerusalem's structure (Rev 21:18-21).

Isaiah 60

Isaiah's description of the glory of restored Zion (cf. 60:14) is repeatedly echoed in Revelation 21:

Isaiah		*Revelation*	
60:1	→	21:11	The city shines with God's glory.
60:3	→	21:24	Nations walk by its light.
60:11	→	21:25-26	Its gates are never shut; nations bring their treasures into it.
60:20	→	21:23	God is the city's light.
60:21	→	21:27	Its citizens are holy.

Joyful Return from Captivity

Isaiah often speaks of the joy of those released from captivity and restored to Jerusalem.
His language is echoed in John's description of the New Jerusalem:
No more death, tears, pain, hunger, thirst, or sunstroke, and being led to springs of living water, etc.
Compare Isaiah 25:8; 35:10; 51:11; 65:19 with Revelation 7:17c and 21:4.
The description in Revelation 7:16-17 derives directly from Isaiah 49:10, which concerns the return of God's people from exile through the work of Yahweh's Servant.[3]

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[1] "Latter days" is a reference to messianic times (cf. Hos 3:5). The reign of God and/or his Messiah will be characterized by justice and by peaceful co-existence between former enemies (Isa 2:4; 9:7; 11:6-9; 19:23-25; 65:25; cf. Eph 2:14-15).
[2] In Revelation 11:8, Jerusalem ("where their Lord was crucified") is called "Sodom and Egypt" and "the great city". Later we see that the great city and Babylon are one and the same (Rev 18:10, 21). Then the harlot herself is identified as Babylon and as the great city (Rev 17:5, 18). Therefore, Jerusalem = Sodom = Egypt = Babylon = a harlot. The point being this: Jerusalem has become the sworn enemy of God's people — their chief persecutor (Rev 17:6; 18:20, 24; cf. Mt 23:34-37).
[3] Revelation 7:9-17 gives a preview of the victorious saints following the Tribulation (Rev 7:14). The vision was intended to inspire first-century Christians who were about to face brutal persecution. It probably depicts the final (heavenly) solace of the martyrs. These have been gathered via resurrection into the heavenly Jerusalem. Within this temple-city they serve day and night as priests before God's throne (Rev 7:15; cf. 22:3).

Ezekiel's Restoration Prophecies

Ezekiel 37:26-28 (MEV):

> *"Moreover I will … set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore.*
> *My tabernacle also shall be with them. Indeed, I will be their God and they shall be My people.*
> *The nations shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore."*

Here, "sanctuary" is a reference to the temple. It anticipates the renewed temple of Ezekiel 41.
Ezekiel's final vision (chaps. 40 – 48) depicts the new theocratic order for restored and purified Israel — an ideal temple, land, and city.

In John's vision, the New Jerusalem is cube-shaped (Rev 21:16), like the Most Holy Place of Ezekiel's temple (Eze 41:4; cf. 1Kgs 6:20).
Thus, the entire city is God's temple,[4] and everyone within is a priest serving before God (Rev 1:6; 7:15; 22:3).[5]

In contrast, "tabernacle" (in Ezekiel 37:27) recalls the wilderness tent and tabernacle.
John's vision draws on this as well.
Revelation 21:3 (MEV):

> *"Look! The tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them.*
> *They shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God."*

Further allusions to Ezekiel's final vision:

- Jerusalem's 12 gates — three on each side, with each gate associated with one Israelite tribe (Rev 21:12-13; cf. Eze 48:30-34).
- The "river of the water of life" flowing from God's throne in the city, with the tree of life on each bank bearing fruit every month and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations (Rev 22:1-2; cf. Eze 47:12). John's imagery further derives from the Garden of Eden, with its river and tree of life (Gen 2:9-10). Like Ezekiel (in 28:13-14), John regarded Eden as God's original temple/mountain-sanctuary.[6]

Here is Ezekiel's decisive last word concerning restored Jerusalem (48:35):
And the name of the city from that time on shall be, "The LORD Is There."

That's what the New Jerusalem is all about!

Conclusion

Since John's vision closely relates to the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel, we may conclude that:

1. John's New Jerusalem represents the definitive fulfillment of these prophecies.
2. John's vision likewise shows Jerusalem restored following judgment and exile.

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[4] Certainly a very large temple-city — a cube with sides of 2200 km. One should recall Zechariah's prophecy that Jerusalem will be greatly enlarged, due in part to the influx of Gentiles (Zec 2:4, 10-11; cf. Isa 49:19-20; 54:1-3).
[5] The Greek verb *latreuō* (Strong's G3000) used in Revelation 7:15 and 22:3 means "to serve" or "worship". God's people serve before him as priests in his temple-city (cf. Rev 1:6; 5:10).
[6] The notion of life-imparting water flowing from the temple or from Jerusalem is also found in Joel 3:18 and Zechariah 14:8. In Revelation this life-imparting water sustains and refreshes those within the city (cf. Ps 46:4; Rev 7:15-17), and via the gospel those outside are invited to freely partake as well (Rev 22:17).