

Jerusalem—The Holy City

“I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”
—*Revelation 21:2*

THERE ARE SCORES OF cities mentioned in the Bible, and some of them are used symbolically in the sacred Word. One of these is Jerusalem. In the time of Abraham, Jerusalem, which means “habitation of peace,” was known by the name of Salem, simply meaning “peace.” Melchizedek was then king of Salem, and in welcoming Abraham he “brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.”—Gen. 14:18

Centuries later, King David conquered Jerusalem and made it his capital. He called it the city of David. (II Sam. 5:4-9) Under David and his son Solomon, Jerusalem became the religious center of all the tribes of Israel. After the country was divided into two kingdoms, Jerusalem remained the capital of Judah, the two-tribe kingdom, where its successive kings reigned.

In the reign of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, Jerusalem was captured by Nebuchadnezzar, king

of Babylon, who destroyed it. (II Kings 25:1-10) After seventy years' captivity in Babylon the Jews returned to their land and Jerusalem was restored under the leadership of Nehemiah. (Neh. 12:26,27) Jerusalem continued to be the heart of the Hebrew revival after the captivity, until the Greeks later captured it, followed by the Roman Empire.

Thus at the time of Jesus' earthly ministry Jerusalem was under the rulership of the Roman Empire, although the Jews were allowed a great deal of religious liberty. The Roman government generally refrained from interfering with their worship as long as the Jews did not attempt to hinder the authority of their civil rulers. Because the Jewish religious rulers in Israel at that time desired to get Jesus out of the way, they were glad to appeal to the Roman civil rulers to help them. To procure this help they charged that Jesus claimed to be a king, which, if true, would have been treason against Rome.—Matt. 26:59-66; John 19:14,15

JESUS' PROPHECY

Just a few days prior to his death, Jesus said to that generation of Israel, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."—Matt. 23:37-39

In this prophecy Jesus uses the city of Jerusalem as representing the entire Jewish polity. "Your house

is left unto you desolate,” he said. The center of Israel’s religious worship had been located on the hill of Zion in Jerusalem, but this was now coming to an end. Within forty years, the desolation of the literal city of Jerusalem was brought about by the Roman army in AD 70-73.

Subsequently, for more than eighteen centuries, Jerusalem was occupied and came under the rule of numerous nations and peoples. Among these were the Romans, Arabs, Crusaders, Saracens, and finally the Turks. The Turks held Jerusalem until the British occupied it in 1917, during the First World War. Jerusalem then became the military headquarters of the British operation in the region. In 1920 the British civil administration was set up in Jerusalem, and this lasted until the reestablishment of Israel as a nation in May 1948.

However, at this time the city was divided. The Israeli government controlled only the new part of the city located outside the walls, while Arabs controlled the more ancient portion of the city within the walls. These two parts of Jerusalem remained separated for nearly twenty years, but were finally joined under Israel’s control at the conclusion of the Six Day War in June 1967. Today Jerusalem has a population of just under one million people, of which 62% are Jews, and 38% are Arabs. About 4% of the Arab population are Christians of various denominations.

THE NEW JERUSALEM

We can well understand the high regard the Jews have for the city of Jerusalem. Because of the unique circumstances associated with this particular city,

the Lord uses it as a symbol of what the Bible describes as “new Jerusalem.” We read, “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”—Rev. 21:2-4

Think of the many wars by which ancient Jerusalem has been ravished, with the consequent sorrow, pain and death. Moreover, these same evils have, through the centuries, afflicted the people of all nations and races. However, these “former things” are to pass away with the coming down out of heaven of the “new Jerusalem” of promise. God’s rulership over Israel, beginning with David, was exercised from ancient Jerusalem, and divine rulership over all mankind will come from the “new Jerusalem,” authorized and empowered by “God out of heaven.”

THE THRONE OF DAVID

When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would be the mother of God’s promised Messiah, he explained that this great one would sit upon the throne of his father David. (Luke 1:30-32) The promise of God was that David’s ruling house would be established forever: “Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy

throne shall be established for ever.” (II Sam. 7:16)
This promise is to be fulfilled through Jesus.

Israel shared in the rulership of the kingdom of David, and could have gone on to share in the rulership of Jesus, the greater David, had they accepted him as a nation when he presented himself to them during his earthly ministry. A few did, and these were given “power,” or authority, “to become the sons of God” in the Christian age then dawning, and thus were made “joint-heirs with Christ.”—John 1:11,12; Rom. 8:17

THE KINGDOM TRANSFERRED

As a nation, however, Israel rejected Jesus. Just a few days before his death, he said to the chief priests and the elders of Israel “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” (Matt. 21:43) These are the fruits of humility and obedience which most Israelites of Jesus’ day failed to display. Therefore, as a nation, they lost the Messianic kingdom privileges of spiritual rulership as joint-heirs with Christ, and this was given to another nation.

Peter identifies this new nation to which the kingdom privileges were transferred. Addressing the followers of the Master, the apostle wrote, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God.”—I Pet. 2:9,10

In other words, the faithful followers of Jesus, regardless of national origin, comprise the “nation”

to which belong the kingdom privileges once possessed exclusively by the natural descendants of Abraham. Believing and faithful Jews can still share these privileges, but no longer exclusively so. Probably the larger proportion of this group will turn out to be Gentiles. The Apostle James said that God visited the Gentiles to “take out of them a people for his name.” This special group is subsequently depicted in the Scriptures as “the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”—Acts 15:14; Rev. 21:9

THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

In Revelation 19:7,8 we read, “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” Thus it becomes evident that the “bride, the Lamb’s wife,” is made up of his faithful followers who suffer and die with him, inspired by the hope of being united with him in glory, and sharing in his thousand-year reign which is designed for the blessing of all the families of the earth.—Rev. 3:21; 20:6; Gen. 12:3; 22:18

The work of God in the earth since the death and resurrection of Jesus, therefore, has been largely the gathering out from the world of this people who would share the Messianic throne with him. They are called by means of the Gospel, and the terms of their calling are a full dedication of themselves to know and to do God’s will. It is God’s will for these that they walk in Jesus’ steps of sacrifice even unto death—Rom. 12:1,2; II Tim. 2:11,12; Rev. 2:10

This “bride” class further makes herself ready by being emptied of self-will and being filled with the Holy Spirit. Under the Spirit’s influence they grow in grace, put on the whole armor of God, and produce the various fruits of the Spirit. (II Pet. 3:18; Eph. 6:13-18; Gal. 5:22,23) This is the work of a lifetime for each member of the bride class, and when the last one has finished this work, the bride will have “made herself ready” for the marriage.

Not until the marriage of the Lamb takes place, can the “holy city” come down from God out of heaven “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” This holy city, the new Jerusalem, is another of the Bible’s symbols of the Messianic kingdom. It will be when that kingdom of blessing commences that pain and death will begin to vanish from the earth. When the work of that kingdom is complete, there will be no more pain and death in the earth, for those “former things” shall have passed away.

TWO PHASES

Concerning the Messianic kingdom, Isaiah 2:2,3 states: “It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”

The explanation that “the law” will go “out of Zion,” and the “word of the LORD from Jerusalem”

suggests that there will be two phases to the kingdom of Christ, symbolized by Zion and Jerusalem. Zion was the highest point in ancient Jerusalem, and well pictures the spiritual, or heavenly, phase of the Messianic kingdom. Revelation 14:1 shows the Lamb, Christ Jesus, standing on Mt. Sion and with him those who follow him “whithersoever he goeth.” (vs. 4) This is the “bride” class—made up of both Jews and Gentiles—who will share in the spiritual rulership of the Messiah.

The faithful servants of God who lived prior to Jesus’ death and were proven faithful, whom we often speak of as the “Ancient Worthies,” will be the perfect human representatives of the divine Christ. (Heb. 11:35,39,40; 12:23) These are well represented by “Jerusalem” in Isaiah’s prophecy. These intermediaries, while not “kings,” will be fully the representatives of the Messiah upon the earth as “princes” and will be recognized as such by mankind. (Isa. 32:1; Ps. 45:16; Luke 13:28; Matt. 8:11) In the resurrection they will be restored to human perfection, which will enable them to communicate by some method with those in the spiritual phase of the kingdom, even as God communicated with Adam in some manner before his fall from perfection.—Gen. 1:27-30

A prophecy referring to the position of the Ancient Worthies in the kingdom reads, “I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city.” (Isa. 1:26) While the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21 pictures more particularly the heavenly phase of the Messianic kingdom, the earthly representatives of that symbolic

city are appropriately referred to by the prophet as a “city of righteousness,” not another government or ruling authority, but the human representatives of the one glorious Messianic kingdom.

Isaiah’s prophecy refers to these human representatives of the kingdom as judges and counselors. Since they will be perfect, their judgments will be just and their counseling wise. The people of all nations will quickly recognize the superior qualities of these faithful ones of old and will be glad to fall in line with their instructions, for it will be discerned that they are speaking and acting on behalf of Christ. Thus, the Messianic kingdom will indeed be an administration of righteousness, with the laws originating in Zion and the word of the Lord going forth from Jerusalem.—Isa. 2:3

THE TEMPLE

John observed that the “holy city” which he saw in vision come down from heaven had no temple in it. (Rev. 21:22) The temple and its services were an important part of ancient Jerusalem, beginning with the reign of Solomon. However, that was merely a symbol of a much better arrangement, in the form of the city which comes down from heaven. John explains that God and the Lamb are the “temple” in this city. Yet another picture of this government is a throne—“the throne of God and of the Lamb.” —Rev. 22:1

This New Jerusalem is not a city made up of literal buildings and walls. We remember Jesus’ reply to the woman of Samaria concerning the proper place to worship. He said, “The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at

Jerusalem, worship the Father. ... But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”—John 4:21,23,24

The New Jerusalem is a beautiful picture of the Messianic kingdom arrangements. All those arrangements, and the personnel associated with them, spiritual and human, will direct the people of all nations to worship, not in a particular city nor in a literal temple, but to revere and honor, in their places of abode and from their hearts, God and his beloved Son. The Lamb will be the light of that city, and its brightness will guide the nations into the true worship of God, that “they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.”—Rev. 21:23; Zeph. 3:9

The Messianic kingdom is not of human origin and is not established by human wisdom and strength. It is God’s arrangement for the blessing of the sin-cursed and dying race. This arrangement calls for the exercise of divine power in the resurrection of the dead—first, Jesus, and at this end of the present Gospel Age, those who are brought forth in the “first resurrection” to “live and reign with him a thousand years.”—Rev. 1:5; 20:6

Then, as previously noted, there will be the “better resurrection” of the Ancient Worthies to perfection of human nature to be the representatives of the divine Christ. (Heb. 11:35,40) Finally, there will be the resurrection of all the dead, Jews and Gentiles. (John 5:28,29; Acts 24:15; I Cor. 15:22) Those Jews at various times who saw their sacred city of

Jerusalem pillaged and destroyed will be awakened and learn that there is now a “new Jerusalem,” an invisible city, or government with Jehovah and his Son, the Lamb which was slain for their redemption, to give them light, guidance, health and life.

With the establishment of the Messianic kingdom will come the fulfillment of Revelation 22:17—“The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” It is interesting to note that all who hear and respond to this invitation to partake of the water of life will have the opportunity of relaying the invitation to others. We believe that to begin with many of those who hear and respond will be the Jews who are restored to their land of promise. However, it will not stop with them, for these blessings of life have been provided for “all families of the earth.”—Gen. 12:3; 22:18

Meanwhile the events taking place in Israel today are among the strong indications that Messiah’s kingdom is near. How enthusiastic the Israelites will be when they realize that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets are in their midst to govern and guide them toward a full restoration of health, peace, blessings and everlasting life! Thank God, also, that this joy will quickly spread to the people of all nations. Let us even now rejoice as we look forward to this glorious time of blessing for all. ■