

# The Holy City

By

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*“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem...” (Rev. 21:2).*

With the land of Palestine in the headlines, with tours to the “holy land” the chief occupation of many religious leaders, and with millions ready, a the drop of a hat, to wage a “holy war” against the Arabs, it is important to understand the Biblical significance of the Holy City, once called Zion, the city of David.

“Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion, the same is the city of David” (II Sam. 5:7, I Chron. 11:5–8). Originally Zion was only a rocky ridge of the area that latter came to be the city of Jerusalem, so that eventually the entire city was called Zion. David built his palace in Zion (II Sam. 5:11) and erected a tent for the Ark, which had previously rested in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle at Gibeon (II Sam. 6:12, 17, I Chron. 16:1). The removing of the Ark from the tabernacle to Zion is highly significant, in that it constituted a decided break with Levitical ordinances given through Moses. The Ark of God’s presence was no longer in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle of the wilderness, but in the tent of David on Mount Zion. The importance of this will be shown later.

Since the presence of God was understood to be manifest in the tent (tabernacle) of David by the Ark, and since David was King of Israel, the city of David, or Zion, came to indicate the presence of God and the location of His authority. Thus in the Psalms the term “Zion” does not merely refer to the earthly city of Jerusalem, but to the throne of God. “Praises to Jehovah who dwells in Zion” (Psa. 9:11); “Everyone...appears before God in Zion” (Psa. 84:7); “Zion heard and was glad” (Psa. 97:8); “Jehovah bless thee out of Zion” (Psa. 134:3).

Jesus said, “The hour comes when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father...the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (John 4:21–23. Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD. It was to have no more significance in the relation of God to man.

When Christ arose from the dead and ascended to Heaven, He fulfilled the promise made to David that one would sit on David’s throne with a kingdom that would never end. This is expressly stated by Peter: “Brethren, I may say unto you freely of the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his loins he would set one upon his throne; he foreseeing this spoke of the resurrection of the Christ that neither was he left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption” (Acts 2:29–31). From this it is evident that David understood that the Messiah who was to come from his seed would be raised from the dead in order to sit on David’s throne while David himself remained in the grave. It is not after the second coming and resurrection of the dead that Christ begins to reign on David’s throne, nor is it an earthly throne in the land of Palestine, but it is the heavenly throne of which ancient Jerusalem was only a shadow or type. The government of God over His people was removed from earthly Zion to heaven. Thus in the Hebrew letter we are told that “you are not come unto a mount that

might be touched...but you are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:18, 22).

Modern “Zionists”, having rejected Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, use the Biblical promises concerning the Holy City as a means of gaining support for political objectives. They justify the slaughter of the Arabs — including a great many Christians — by the claim that the land of Palestine was promised to Abraham and his children. But this promise was totally fulfilled. Note: (Joshua 21:43–45) “And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto the fathers; and they possessed it and dwelt therein...There failed nothing of any good thing which Jehovah had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.” Thus the present war over the land of Palestine and so-called “Zion” has nothing to do with the ancient promise, except by its deceitful use for political and material gain.

A modern doctrine, known as pre-millennialism, insist that the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel are to be fulfilled in the future in a natural sense, with a “restored” political nation of Jews, and Christ ruling the world from earthly Jerusalem. But the apostles declared that the Christians are the true Israel of God: “They that are of the faith, the same are the sons of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7). “If you are Christ’s then are you Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29). “For they are not all Israel that are of Israel: neither because they are Abraham’s seed are they all children: but in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, it is not the children of the flesh that are the children of God; but the children of the promise are reckoned for a seed” (Rom. 9:7–8). “That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel” (Eph. 3:6). “Wherefore, receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace” (Heb. 12:28). Being “joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17) Christians are the rightful heirs of the promises to Abraham, and the kingdom is the spiritual kingdom now in effect, with Christ reigning on David’s throne in Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. Peter writes that Christians have come to a “living stone”, Christ, and are “living stones”...“Spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Because it is contained in Scripture, behold I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious: and he that believes on him shall not be put to shame” (I Pet. 2:3–6). It is clear that Jesus is the “living stone,” the “chief corner stone,” and Zion is the heavenly headquarters where Christ rules His people. Christians constitute the temple and as holy priests offer spiritual sacrifices to God. “God has delivered us out of the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of His Son” (Col. 1:13).

Regarding the physical descendants of Abraham, which are called “Israel after the flesh”, there is no promise of God to them today based upon race. Jesus said to them in Matt. 21:43: “Therefore say I unto you, the Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth fruit thereof.” The Jews were bitterly incensed against Christ for such statements and, after several attempts on His life, finally succeeded in getting Him executed as an insurrectionist. Nevertheless, when the gospel was preached on the day of Pentecost, over 3,000 Jews gave up Judaism and became citizens of the heavenly Kingdom. Many others of “fleshly Israel” became Christians, but the sum total of them amounted to only a “remnant” of the entire nation. The unbelieving Jews persecuted the Christians, as they had Jesus, so that believers met in secret “for fear of the Jews” (John 20:19).

Paul expressly stated that God no longer distinguishes the fleshly Israelite from the Gentile. “There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female: for you are all one man in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s then are you Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:28–29). A modern Jew can be saved like anyone else, by giving up Judaism, and believing the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the meaning of Paul’s statements in Romans, chapters 9 through 11. He declares that “God has not cast away His people which He foreknew...a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom. 11:1, 5).

But who are God’s people? They are the ones “He foreknew...a remnant according to the election of grace.” Not according to physical birth and fleshly descent from Abraham, but according to grace, redemption through Christ. In the concluding verses of the discussion, Paul writes “and so all Israel shall be saved” (11:25). Many think of this as the earthly nation of Israel and look to a time when all Jews will believe on Christ. But what Paul is saying is that all who are saved will be saved by grace through Christ. All Israel does not mean all Jews, but all who are “the children of the promise” (9:8) which includes believing Gentiles and the “remnant” of Jews. It is “His people whom He foreknew” (11:2), “the election” (11:7), those Jews that “continue not in their unbelief (11:23); hence, “all Israel”. All who are saved are called Israel, and this has nothing to do with a worldly kingdom, geographical location nor racial descent.

Paul preached that Christ would return to resurrect the dead, that the wicked would be destroyed at His coming and the saints would be given immortality. Hear him before King Agrippa: “I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise of God unto our Father, unto which promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God day and night hope to attain. And concerning this hope I am accused by the Jews. O King! Why is it judged incredible with you, If God does raise the dead?” (Acts 26:6–8). Thus the Old Testament promise of a King on David’s throne was fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ and His ascension to glory, and the promises of blessing to all God’s people will be ultimately fulfilled in the Christian’s resurrection to be made immortal and to dwell forever in a new creation, in fellowship with God.

The Holy City described in Revelation is nothing other than Christ’s church. “And there came one of the seven angels...and he spoke with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in the spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Rev. 21:9–10). It is universally agreed by Bible students that the bride of Christ is the church. When John saw the bride, he was looking at the holy city Jerusalem! Thus we understand that the “beloved city” which was surrounded by Satan and his hosts (Rev. 20:9) is simply the church as it is today, surrounded and attacked by atheists and enemies, through the press, by TV, and in the public schools, as well as by false prophets who claim to be Christians.

The beast of Revelation 13 is said to “open his mouth for blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name, and His tabernacle, even them that dwell in heaven” (Verse 6). Obviously this is blasphemy against God’s seat of authority, His “tabernacle,” which at one time was on earth, but now is removed to heaven. Just as the Ark (the presence of God) was moved from the earthly tabernacle in the wilderness to David’s city of Zion, so the throne of Christ is transferred from the earthly city of Jerusalem to Heaven. Millions of those who today make much of the “holy land” and the city of Jerusalem, at the same

time reject and resist the authority of Christ in the true Zion (heaven), thus blaspheming God's tabernacle.

According to the law, the sacrifice for the yearly sin-offering was burned outside the camp of Israel. So Jesus, the true sacrifice, was put to death outside the gate of Jerusalem (Heb. 13:12), taking upon Himself the punishment due the sinner. In the picture of judgment in Revelation, when God's wrath is exercised upon the ungodly, "the winepress was trodden without the city" (Rev. 14:20). Thus in judgment the wicked will be put to death outside the heavenly city; that is, completely apart from and outside the realm of the saints. At Christ's coming the believers of all ages will be "caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (I Thess. 4:17 away from the destruction of all those left, who shall be destroyed by fire. The earthly Jerusalem will burn the same as any other city (II Pet. 3:7-13, Matt. 10:28, Jude 7, II Thess. 1:7-9).

"And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). The bride is the church (Eph. 5:22-32). After the destruction of the ungodly there will be "new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness" (II Pet. 3:13). The people of God, all the redeemed of all ages, will make up the "holy city" and will be given the new earth for a place of habitation. Thus the new Jerusalem will not be a rebuilt city of Palestine, but the entire body of the glorified and immortal saints. It is not a material city of skyscrapers, industries, shopping centers, streets, etc. Being "made ready as a bride" has nothing to do with these, but describes the saints, who have turned in faith to Christ the King, who are cleansed from sin by His atoning death, who are transformed into His image, and thus fit to live in His presence forever.

While there are many Christian Arabs, the modern city of Jerusalem is mostly made up of Moslems and Jews, the latter being hostile to Christ and Christians. Thus it is not a "holy city." Knowing these things, Christians, like Abraham, are to "look for the city which has the foundation, whose builder and maker is God." Our Kingdom is not of this world. Our King is Christ. His word is our only weapon, faith is our shield, His commandments our law and His image our goal. "If then you were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth...when Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall you also with Him be manifested in glory" (Col. 3:1, 2, 4).

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