

THE NEW JERUSALEM

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The biblical concept of a New (heavenly) Jerusalem has most certainly intrigued many throughout the centuries. Although the idea is noted on more than one place in the Bible, it is the imagery of Revelation 21 and 22 that has grabbed the interest - probably enhanced by the popular modern end-times books and films, paintings, and of course, the pulpit theology of our churches. Differences of opinion abound - even the measurements given in Rev. 21:16 have given rise to different opinions and philosophies. For some it is clearly a cube (symbol of perfection). Others point out it might also be a pyramid. Many are eagerly awaiting the day that the new holy city comes down out of heaven from God (and according to some, to hang in the air above physical Jerusalem).

In our attempts to rightly divide the Word of Truth, we feel strongly about a back to basics approach. Let us do so then, but bearing in mind the very short format of this article. These basics have to include the short background description of the book of Revelation, as well as a brief consideration of the biblical Jerusalem and the position of the Jerusalem of our generation.

The Revelation of Christ to John

The first word of the Greek text of this book is *apokalypsis*. It simply means 'revelation' or 'unveiling'. (Compare this with the word *occult*, which means that which is kept secret or hidden). Though some scholars differ, it is commonly accepted as apocalyptic literature, which was popular

The seven churches are mentioned in the sequence of their physical location in which the messenger would have travelled to deliver the seven letters.

among the Jews of biblical times to strengthen God's people in persecution with assurance of eventual deliverance and triumph. It was **written to seven specific churches** to encourage believers in Christ in a time of great persecution by the Roman Empire, which we accept on the basis of much evidence to be the time of Nero (c. 68AD).

"The Bible is summed up in the message of hope and rich symbolism of this book. It is a vision of rescue from the trials which beset God's people, and a promise of a glorious future. The message is expressed by means of imagery which draws on the whole of the Bible, so that every feature, animals, colours, numbers, is evocative and full of overtones to a reader familiar with the OT. In this way it is a secret and allusive revelation of what (was) to come, through the natural symbolism of the great acts of worship and the final vision of the messianic splendour of the Holy City are clear enough" (The New Jerusalem Bible, p1416).¹

Whereas the recipients or at least their leaders would understand the message, their persecutors would be in the dark.

“Blessed is the one who reads and blessed are those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep it”. (Rev. 1:3).

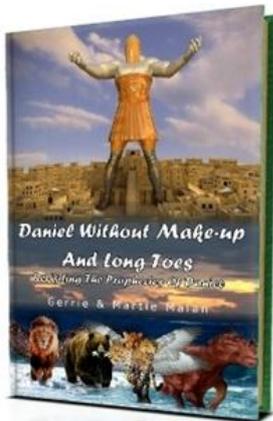
John is instructed to write down what he has seen, what is (at that time) and what was to come *soon* or *quickly*. And in Rev. 22:20 it is written, “Yes, I am coming quickly”. There is only one way to read the Revelation into the present time or future of our generation, and that is

The Greek word *táchos*, used in both Rev. 1:1 and 22:20, carries the meaning of quickly, of short duration, speedily, soon, shortly, suddenly.²

to force and philosophise it into the text, to read above what is written. Please test it without using a Left Behind fiction novel as your study guide. We can never allow words implying future take on the meaning of our future – it was always the future of the readers and audiences of that specific time. [Consider downloading our free concise eBook, [Rightly Divide The Word](#), in which we discuss basic principles of interpretation].

The old, earthly Jerusalem

Although there is no biblical city or town as well known as Jerusalem, and which many today still call the holy city, Jerusalem was not built, and actually not even named by the Hebrew nation. The name is found for the first time in Joshua 10:1. It was a Jebusite city before David captured it (2 Sam 5:6). The original name was most likely Urusalimum or Ursalimmu. It meant ‘Foundation of Shalem’, which was a known Ugaritic god. The name was probably only Hebraized because it seemed to mean ‘Rain of Peace’. In other words, the Hebrews seemingly did not rename the city when they had the chance, perhaps because it was easily transliterated into something very Hebrew.³



When Solomon dedicated the temple he built, he said that the Lord God had spoken directly to his father, David, saying that He had chosen Jerusalem so that His name would be there (2 Chr 6:6). Nehemiah 11:1 is the first of five mentions of Jerusalem as “the holy city” in the Old Testament. The last reference is the seventy sevens prophecy in Daniel 9:24. The New Testament also has five mentions - two in Matthew and three in Revelation. In Revelation 11:2 it is about the physical Jerusalem, with Revelation 21:2 and 22:19 speaking about the New Jerusalem.

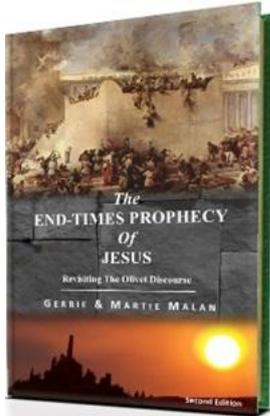
- The Jerusalem of old was the city on which God placed his name.
- The Jews regarded it as the centre of the world (Ezek 5:5).
- It was the city housing the temple.
- The temple was known as God’s House, as the place of meeting with God.
- The Jews were required to go to Jerusalem on specific occasions to worship.

In her conversation with Jesus at the well the woman of Samaria noted that the Jews said they should go to Jerusalem to worship. She called Jacob their father (in other words their direct ancestor). Jesus replied that there would come a day (**and then already was**) when **true worshipers** would no longer go to (physical) Jerusalem, but they would worship the Father in spirit and in truth. Those were the people the Father wanted to worship Him (John 4:19-24).

There can be no doubt that we have here a description of the New Jerusalem:

- *It is, after all, the New Testament place of God’s presence!*

- *It has no temple, for God and the Lamb are its sanctuary! (Rev 21:22)*
- *It is everywhere that believers worship in spirit and in truth, which is what the Father wants!*
- *Believers do not have to go to earthly Jerusalem to worship in the sense required in the Mosaic era. In fact they cannot, for God removed the temple of religion from his sight!*



The old (physical) Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman army in AD 70 fulfilling the prophecy of Jesus recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. Jerusalem was so utterly destroyed that it took some 200 years before any notable development was undertaken on the location. The inhabitants of that Jerusalem went through a great tribulation such as never was before and never would be again (Matt 24:21). Anyone who does not believe the truth of this statement should read Josephus' account of the event. In other words, God removed, according to the prophecy of his Son, the old holy city and the temple, previously the symbol and centre of God's presence among men, from his sight! The New Jerusalem is wherever believers worship in spirit and in truth.

Paul called the physical Jerusalem of his time a city of slavery: *"Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above IS free, and she IS our mother."* (Gal 4:25, 26). Is it any wonder then that the earthly Jerusalem, **which is no longer the holy city of old, and never again will be**, is a city divided among three religions, and that the Temple Mount is occupied by the children of Hagar? The time has come for Christians who lead pilgrimages to a so-called holy city that is not anymore, to reconsider just what exactly they are doing. By saying this we do not imply they should not visit Jerusalem, only that they need to bring it into proper perspective.

The New Jerusalem

In his reference to the Jerusalem above Paul was using the long held rabbinical understanding of a heavenly city which was the archetype of the physical one. It described a spiritual city, one which is free and independent of the Mosaic law.⁴ The writer to the Hebrews used the same idea (Heb 12:22-24). And in this city to which the readers/audience **had come** according to him, he described the presence of:

- Myriads of angels (some translations add 'in festive gathering' or similar);
- The assembly of the firstborn;
- God, the judge of all;
- Spirits of the righteous people made perfect;
- Jesus (mediator of a new covenant – Heb 9:15); and
- The sprinkled blood (of the Lamb – Heb 9:11-14).

No explanation is needed of the presence of angels, God, and Jesus.

- The sprinkled blood of the Lamb in the holy of holies of the tabernacle not made by hands was applied **once for all, having obtained eternal redemption**.
- The assembly of the firstborn (or firstbegotten) is one on which scholars have different views. We understand it to be the spirits of the deceased of Israel who had been in *sheol/hades* under the Old Covenant, awaiting the Messiah. They were resurrected from *sheol/hades* after the Christ Jesus, the Son of God seated at the right hand of God in heaven, who is described as the firstborn from the dead, came in judgment upon Jerusalem and Judea in 70 AD (Matt 24). [Please see our article on the [Great White Throne Judgment](#)].
- And on the basis of 1 Peter 3:19, the spirits of the righteous people made perfect may be understood as the spirits of righteous people other than those of Israel through the ages. Under the new covenant there was no longer a separation or differentiation between Israel as God's chosen people and other nations. The sea (or nations in separated sense) existed no longer (Rev 21:1; 2 Cor 5:17).

The organisation on earth generally called the church is not the Bride of Christ. This New, Spiritual Jerusalem is the Bride, the Wife of the Lamb (Rev 21:9-10). From this 'marriage', generations of believers in the Son of God have been, are being, and will be brought forth (begotten).

We can hear the question: Why, if you say the New Jerusalem of the Revelation already is, is the world in the state it is in? The answer comes from both the Old and New Testaments. Modern humankind, like Israel of old, is a stiff-necked people. Despite being the chosen nation through which God was to be known by the world, Israel consistently did what was evil in the Lord's sight during the Mosaic Covenant age and the recorded history is there for all to read (see the Book of Judges, for example). In the New Testament we read that Yeshua MiNatzaret spoke out against the religious leaders of Jerusalem, declaring they had revoked God's word because of their tradition. Religious leaders through the centuries since Christ have done the same and because of their man-made traditions have robbed the word of God of its power. It is no wonder that the modern church has lost its voice in the world to large extent. The fruit of it all is that the nations of the world, not even the so-called Christian nations, have true Godly men and women leading them today.

"(...) you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God (the heavenly Jerusalem)(...) (HCSB)⁵

"But you have drawn near Zion Mount, and a city God of (the) living. Jerusalem to a heavenly (...)" (The Interlinear Bible).⁶

"But ye are come unto mount Siyon, and unto the city of the living Elohim, the Yeru Shalem of the heavenlies" (Exegeses Ready Research Bible).⁷

"(...) you have come to Mount Tziyon, that is, the city of the living God, heavenly Yerushalayim (...)" (The Complete Jewish Bible).⁸

There is only one way to deny the contextual truth of this portion of the Scriptures and that is to philosophise other meanings into it.

¹ WANSBROUGH, H. (ed.). Reader's Edition. 1990. *The New Jerusalem Bible*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.

² ZODHIATES, S. *The Complete WordStudy Dictionary*. Add-on to e-Sword. 2010. Rick Meyers. E-Sword Version 9.7.2. www.e-sword.net/support.html.

³ www.abarim-publications.com/Meaning/Jerusalem.html.

⁴ VINCENT'S WORD STUDIES; ROBERTSON'S WORD PICTURES. e-Sword[®], Version 10.1.0, 2000-2012, Rick Meyers.

⁵ HCSB. 2006. *The Holman Illustrated Study Bible*. Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers.

⁶ GREEN, J.P. Sr. 1986. *The Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-Greek-English*. Hendrickson Publishers.

⁷ JAHN, H. 2nd. Ed. 1993. *Exegesis Ready Research Bible: A literal translation and transliteration of Scripture*. Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers.

⁸ STERN, D.H. 1998. *Complete Jewish Bible*. Clarksville, Maryland: Jewish New Testament Publications.

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