

THE CITY OF GOD - LITERAL OR SYMBOLIC?

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since Cain “went out from the presence of the Lord” and “built a city” (Gen. 4:16-17), cities have been intimately connected with the history of man. Many would have been built during the centuries from Cain to Noah, but were all destroyed in the flood of Noah’s day.

After the flood, Noah’s descendants decided to “build a city and a tower whose top may reach to heaven.” Gen. 11:1-9. Human pride and prestige seems to have been the motive behind the building of it, because the record says their intention was to make a name for themselves. Human pride usually leads to division and confusion, so it is appropriate that the city was called “Babel” which means confusion.

From Babel to Babylon to Rome, down to New York, London, Paris etc, cities have been centres of civilization - the hub of society - a compact community where thousands or millions of people live and work.

Cities developed out of the pastoral or agricultural life. People who cultivated the soil built houses which grew into villages which had to be protected from the enemy, resulting in defence walls being built around them. A village in such an enclosure was like a large “house” where families lived and fellowshiped together and supported each other.

But it was only a question of time before stalls, markets and shops were set up resulting in trade, commerce and various forms of public business being transacted, and modern cities today are the amplified result of this.

Today, man is more interested in building a city for the purpose of buying and selling to make money, than to live with his fellow man in love and unity as a family, sharing and fellowshiping together and supporting each other.

Cities today are basically seen as places to work, do business, entertain or be entertained for money and pleasure. Pleasure and profit are the main underlying motives which keep the machinery of a city ticking over. Take away the materialistic spirit and the profit-pleasure motive it creates, and the chief driving force behind the cities of the world would be gone.

Because of the purchasing power of money and the prestige and pleasure such purchasing can create, the love and deification of money (which is the root of all evil) inspires the pride of man. And because money can be made in cities, the bigger the city the better! The spirit of those in Gen. 11 who wanted to build a city whose top reached high into the sky in order to make a name for themselves, is still very much with us

today, and is manifested in the “sky scrapers” of the multi-billion dollar business syndicates or magnates whose reason for living in many cases, is to get rich and make a name for themselves, and who have no scruples about using corruption, graft and exploitation to achieve their ends.

Most of the large cities today are, to coin a phrase, “concrete jungles” and a “rat race.” They are overcrowded, dirty, and noisy. Traffic jams delay people who are trying to get to and from work, stores, or other places. Aeroplanes, automobiles, buses, trucks, factories, and other sources pollute the air with fumes that endanger people’s health. Motor vehicles, factories, sirens, building and demolition machinery create noise that often becomes nerve-racking, creating tension and bad temper or rage.

Cities of the world all contain places where lust is exalted and promoted, be it in the movie theatres, strip clubs, massage parlours, magazine racks, or just in the dress (or lack of it) worn by those who walk the streets.

Sexual crimes and other forms of crime and violence are increasing at an alarming rate in the cities, making it unsafe to walk in certain areas at night and even in daytime. Some complexes of multi-story blocks have become such a lawless jungle, that people are too afraid to live there and city councils have been forced to abandon them as a total loss. Overcrowding in such complexes causes gang warfare and hooliganism, and breeds mental illness (neurosis) resulting from time to time in suicide.

In most large cities, poverty and wealth co-exist; they have a high crime rate, and violence sometimes breaks out between racial, religious, and other groups. There is much evil lurking behind the bright flashing lights; sin abounds in many forms: theft, shop-lifting, robbery, rudeness, abuse, drunkenness, drug addiction, kidnapping, prostitution, pornography, rape, gambling, muggings, murder.

Those who are continually subjected to living in this kind of environment and atmosphere become hardened to it and their own personality easily becomes hard and heartless, with the result that city life becomes impersonal, uncaring, insensitive, unsympathetic to the needs of others. A person can be lying down on the footpath having a heart attack and people will walk past without stopping to render assistance!

Such cities do not glorify God or give Him pleasure. Quite the opposite: they displease Him and make Him angry. They are not His idea of how cities should be. It is not surprising therefore that when the time comes for the earth to be judged, that the cities will not get off lightly.

We read in Rev. 16:18-20 that an earthquake of unprecedented

magnitude is going to so violently shake the earth that all the cities of the nations will collapse and fall. Tremendous loss of life will obviously occur among the world's population which does not belong to God.

But God has prepared a city for those who do belong to Him - a city whose top truly reaches to heaven and in which the name of God, not man, will be exalted. It is a city that man could never build or find the resources to build - a city so mind-boggling and awesome in size, glory and splendour, that even many Christians find it too staggering to believe. It will cause the largest and greatest city of man to fade into insignificance.

There is no pollution of any kind in this city, be it moral, spiritual or physical. Righteousness, justice and equity prevails, resulting in fullness of love, joy and peace among all who live there. Money is not needed, crime and violence are non-existent; sickness, sorrow, suffering and death are unheard of. All who live there partake of divine nature and are immortal. It is the ultimate utopia - a perfect city in every possible respect - the city of God.

God's ultimate purpose is for His people from all nations and generations to live together in this city, united as one family under the headship of Christ. Many Scriptures refer to the city, forming a high and lofty and noble theme, and the purpose of this book is to look at them and learn as much as we can about it. Of particular interest of course, as the title of the book indicates, is whether the city is literal or symbolic.

* * * * *

CHAPTER ONE

A CITY WHOSE BUILDER AND MAKER IS GOD

In the Bible, tents are contrasted with cities. Tents were made out of cloth woven from goat's hair, fastened with cords and stakes. Cities were made out of stone fastened together with mortar and sometimes metal straps. Tents were a temporary moveable habitation; cities were much more permanent and fixed by comparison.

When Abraham, the father of the faithful and friend of God, was called out of Ur of the Chaldees into the Promised Land, there were many cities in the land occupied by the local Canaanites, offering prosperity, pleasure and security to Abraham. But Abraham chose not to live in a city with them, neither did he build a city for himself.

Abraham's nephew Lot, who accompanied him from Ur to Canaan, ended up living in the city of Sodom, but not Abraham. The contrast between the two different habitations chosen by these men can be seen in Genesis Chapter 18. Verse one refers to Abraham sitting "in the tent door," and verse 24 through into chapter 19 refers to Lot sitting in the city gate and living in the city.

Why did Abraham choose to live in a tent instead of a city? Heb. 11:9-10 explains: "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Although God had promised to give Abraham the land of Canaan as an everlasting inheritance, he died without receiving "so much as to set his foot on" (Act. 7:1-5). While Abraham lived in the land, the native Canaanite inhabitants continued to live there, which made Abraham feel like he was living in a foreign land, even though it had been promised to him.

Because the Canaanites were idolaters and steeped in superstitious pagan doctrines and practices, Abraham did not seek fellowship or citizenship with them, and therefore did not settle down or live with them in any of their cities. Although the words in Psa. 107:4 "they found no city to dwell in," do not actually relate to Abraham and his family, the principle does.

Because Abraham could not find a city in which the One true God was worshipped in spirit and in truth, he stayed outside in the country and lived in tents, assuming the role of a "stranger."

Abraham was not against living in a city, but it had to be a city of

God. It was, in fact, his hope to live in such a city as we read in Heb. 11:10: “He looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” This implies that Abraham ultimately expected to live in a city built and made by God when he inherited and possessed the Promised Land.

A CITY WHICH HAS FOUNDATIONS

The reference to Abraham looking for a city which “has foundations,” does not imply that the cities of the Canaanites and others do not have foundations. Man-made cities do have foundations, but no matter how deep and solid they are, they are shakeable and will ultimately be shaken and fall in the judgement of God when the earth is violently convulsed (Heb. 12:26. Rev. 16:18).

From God’s point of view, anything shakeable has no foundation. “A city which has foundations” means an unshakeable city - a city that can never be destroyed. This significance can be seen in Lk. 6:46-48 which refers to “a man who built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock; and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house and could not shake it, because it was founded on a rock.”

Abraham, being a prophet (Gen. 20:7. Psa. 105:8-15) knew that all the cities of the Canaanites in his day and cities of the world in the end time would be shaken and collapse into rubble. In fact, he had a preview in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Knowing this, Abraham preferred to live in the hills in a tent, waiting for an unshakeable city, “a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

Human technology in Abraham’s day and our own day could not build a city that could withstand the kind of shaking that will take place when the Lord arises to shake terribly the whole earth (Isa. 2). Only God could build a city with unshakeable foundations, and the words “whose builder and maker is God,” teach that the city is divinely constructed. It is not made by human hands.

GOD HAS PREPARED A CITY

Hebrews 11:15 informs us that if Abraham and his family were homesick for the country from which they migrated, they had opportunity to return. But verse 16 goes on to say they didn’t because “they desired a better country, that is, an heavenly: therefore God is not

ashamed to be called their God: for He has prepared for them a city.”

Reference to the city in connection with a heavenly country has caused some to think that God’s people must abandon the earth to live there.

However, another reference to the city in Heb. 13:12-14 reveals this is not the case. It reads: “For here (on earth at the moment, particularly Jerusalem) we have no continuing (unshakeable) city, but we seek one to come.”

We learn from this that the city is coming to earth in order for the saints to live in it.

The three verses in Heb. 11:10, 16 and 13:14 teach three significant points:

1. God is the builder and maker of the city.
2. God has prepared the city.
3. The city is coming to earth.

It is evident from this that the city is already built and will come to earth as a complete city. It will not be built upon earth by human hands!

A HEAVENLY COUNTRY

The country that was promised to Abraham extended from “the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates” (Gen. 15:18). During Abraham’s day it was not a heavenly country but a heathen country, dominated by the idolatrous cities of the pagan Canaanites.

But Abraham, by faith, could see afar off to the time when these cities would be shaken and disappear, and when the city of God would come to the land.

When the land is ruled by the “heavenly Jerusalem” it will become, as we read in Heb. 11:16: “a better country, that is, an heavenly.”

Abraham obviously will not live alone in the city. Those who belong to Christ become “Abraham’s seed” and “heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3). They will inherit the city of God with Abraham. Abraham and many others will obviously have to be raised from the dead for this to be fulfilled, and this will take place at the second coming of Christ (Matt. 22:23-33).

In that day the Lord’s prayer will be fulfilled: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Heaven is coming to earth! This is what the second coming of Jesus Christ is all about.

MOUNT ZION, THE CITY OF THE LIVING GOD

The wonderful prospect of this blessed Christian hope is presented in Heb. 12:22-24. In these verses the writer says the hope of the Christian faith has before it the prospect of “Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, an innumerable company of angels in joyful festal gathering, (“in high festival” - Rotherham), and the church

^ In this passage the city is intimately connected with Zion which is not surprising. Zion is a synonym for Jerusalem and it will be at Jerusalem where David used to sit as king that Jesus will sit on his throne as king over all the earth (Lk. 1:30-33). For this reason the city is called “heavenly Jerusalem.” The old city of Jerusalem whose builder and maker is not God, will disappear, and a new Jerusalem prepared by God - a “heavenly Jerusalem” will come to take its place.

Heb. 12:22 also indicates that the city is very large because not only does it house all the angels (“an innumerable company” - over 100 million: Rev. 5:11), but it will also be the home of all the saints i.e. the “church,” which will also involve myriads of people.

The saints will be equal to the angels (Lk. 20:36) and will be united with them in the city of God in “high festival,” rejoicing together in the presence of God, offering praise and worship as we read in Rev. 7:9-12. Between the angels and saints, hundreds of millions will be involved and the city would need to be large to accommodate such numbers.

NEW JERUSALEM COMING DOWN FROM HEAVEN

With these thoughts in mind we turn to the book of Revelation. To start with, chapter 3:12 refers to “the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven (the sky) from my God.”

This confirms some of the points already considered in the book of Hebrews. It is clearly God’s city, built by Him, and it is coming down from above to the earth. In Gal. 4:26 the apostle Paul refers to it as “Jerusalem which is above.” In its context he is actually referring to the church, but he refers to the new Jerusalem because it is to be the city and habitation of the multitudinous body of Christ. It is quite common in Scripture for the name Jerusalem to be used to refer to the inhabitants of the city as well as the city itself. For example: Matt. 3:5. 21:10. 23:37. Also see Matt. 8:34. Mk. 1:33. Acts 13:44 where “city” refers to people,

but nobody would conclude on this basis that a literal city did not exist.

The city of God is called “new Jerusalem” because it will encompass and replace the old Jerusalem. If the city came to the U.S.A. or Britain it might be called “new Washington” or “new London.” However, it is not coming to any of those countries but in the land promised to Abraham, and its centre will be connected to the site of old Jerusalem.

Now, if this was all we were told about the city, and it was left to our imagination to guess its size and dimensions and the materials out of which it is constructed, it is unlikely that the greatest imagination would come anywhere near the truth of it. A divine revelation is clearly required on the matter and is provided in chapters 21 and 22 of the book of Revelation. It is surely significant that the revelation concerning the city is withheld until the last book of the Bible and the last two chapters of that book. It is the crown and culmination of divine revelation - the grand climax to the prophetic Word!

A GREAT AND HIGH MOUNTAIN

We read in Rev. 21:2 that John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven. In order to see this, he was carried away in the spirit to a “great and high mountain” (21:10). The fact that John saw the city descend while standing on this mountain indicates that the city was descending to the geographical area or country to which the mountain belonged.

It is generally accepted that this great and high mountain is the “very high mountain” to which the prophet Ezekiel was carried in the spirit and from which he saw what appeared to be a city (Ezk. 40:2). It is plainly stated in this verse that the mountain was in the land of Israel, and it is evident from the ensuing chapters that it is Mount Zion at Jerusalem.

The fact that the city is called “new Jerusalem” indicates that the city has its focal centre at the site of Jerusalem and that the high mountain belongs to that area of the land. We have already seen that “mount Zion” is inseparably linked with the city of God in Heb. 12:22.

According to Zech. 14, the site of Jerusalem is going to be heaved up to a much higher position by the mighty earthquake that occurs at the second coming of Christ. This earthquake at the same time will level the hills in Israel and cause the cities of the nations to collapse. Ps. 102:16 says: “When the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory.”

Ps. 48:1-2 refers to “the city of our God in the holy mountain, beautiful for elevation, the joy of the whole earth is mount Zion, on the

sides of the north, the city of the great king.” (Quoted by Jesus in Matt. 5:35).

Ps. 48 is a Messianic Psalm and awaits the return and reign of Christ to be fulfilled. It will not be until then that Jerusalem will be “the joy of the whole earth.” Until then it will be “a burdensome stone for all nations” causing injury and pain (Zech. 12:3).

Ps. 48:4 refers to kings and their armies who assemble against Jerusalem. It is against these forces that Jesus comes from heaven to fight and destroy at the battle of Armageddon, and they not only see him descending but also the city. Ps. 48:5 says: “As soon as they saw it, they were astounded, they were in panic, they took to flight; trembling took hold of them there, anguish as of a woman in travail.”

It is obviously a very awesome and awe-inspiring city!

Regarding the site of Jerusalem being elevated, Ps. 68:15-16 indicates that it will be the highest mountain in the land, higher than Mt Hermon which is the highest (2,773 metres i.e. 9,100 feet) in that part of the earth. This is suggested by the fact that Mt Hermon (“mount of Bashan”) is asked the question: “Why look you with envy, O many-peaked mountain, at the mount which God desired for His abode, where the Lord will dwell forever?”

The end time earthquake is going to reduce the height of mountains around the world, causing them to roll down into, and fill valleys, and even disappear altogether in some cases (Isa. 40:4. Ezk. 38:20. Rev. 6:14. 16:20). In view of this it is possible that Mt Zion could end up being the highest mountain in the earth!

Another well known Scripture which refers to the future Mt Zion is Isa. 2: “And it shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall tower above the top of the mountains

MIND-BOGGLING PROPORTIONS

As a result of being taken to the high mountain to see the city descending, John then gives a detailed description of it. The most mind-boggling aspect about the city from a human point of view, is its size. We read in verse 16 that “the city lies foursquare, its length the same as its breadth; and he (the angel) measured the city with the reed 12,000 stadia (furlongs); its length and breadth and height are equal.”

The city is laid out as a quadrangle, perfectly square, like the structure seen by Ezekiel, but the city in Rev. 21 is vastly greater in size. Not only is the length and breadth the same, but the height also. The city

is a perfect geometrical shape - a cube - a cubical city!

12,000 stadia or furlongs is about 1,500 miles or 2,400 kilometres. Now, the reference to the city measuring 12,000 furlongs, its length, breadth and height being equal, can be interpreted in two different ways. It can be interpreted to mean that the length, breadth and height are each 12,000 furlongs, making the city 12,000 furlongs square. Or, it can be interpreted to mean that the total outside circumference of the city measured 12,000 furlongs, which means the length, breadth and height, in order to be equal, each measured 3,000 furlongs i.e. about 375 miles or 600 Kms. So we have a choice between a 1,500 and a 375 mile square city.

In view of the fact that the city will be the metropolis of the promised land, and will “rest” upon Mount Zion and hover over the land, it is to be expected that the foundation will be a similar size to the land. A 1,500 mile square city would extend well beyond its borders and reach as far as Rome. But a 375 mile square city would fit within the northern and southern boundaries and extend eastward into the Arabian Peninsula. There is a Rabbinical saying that Jerusalem would be enlarged until it reached the gates of Damascus, and exalted until it reached the throne of God, stretching from earth to heaven, uniting them into one. The city in Rev. 21 would certainly reach Damascus and extend high into the heavens. No wonder, in view of the size of the city that it is paralleled with the country: “a better country, that is, an heavenly” (Heb.11:16).

It is impossible to know how many rooms are in the city because their sizes and dimensions are not revealed to us. The throne room alone, in which all the angels and those redeemed from mankind are seen worshipping God in the book of Revelation, would obviously be massive.

As mentioned before, Rev. 5:11 refers to 100 million angels around the throne. 100 million is roughly the population of Mexico or Japan and twice the population of Great Britain. If each of the 100 million standing around the throne only occupied a space of 3 feet square (allowing for prostrating themselves in worship), they would take up an area of 30 miles square. If the number of saints are equal to the angels, an area of 60 miles square would be required. Jesus himself said: “In my Father’s house there are many rooms” (John 14:1-3).

Because of the lack of revelation on this matter, it is foolish to speculate, but curiosity sometimes indulges in a little foolishness. For example, in a 375 mile cube you would get 556,182,000 rooms (suites?) each measuring a little under 100 feet square with ceilings 10 feet high! Allowing for the throne room, hallways, streets, parks etc, this number of

rooms would be reduced quite considerably. If the saints equalled the number of angels given in Rev. 5:11, the total would exceed two hundred million, (the same number that occurs in Rev. 9:16).

From a purely human point of view, the dimensions of this city are staggering and unbelievable, defying all human imagination. It is natural to be repelled at the thought of it being literal. A city of such mammoth proportions is so mind boggling that the finite human mind immediately has an urge to reject a literal interpretation and regard it as highly symbolic and spiritualize it all away. But we need to think very carefully before rushing in and doing so.

Treating prophecies such as the city of God metaphorically instead of literally, frittering it all away into metaphysical speculation, has the effect of taking away from the prophecy of the book, reducing solid, substantial glorious reality into mere symbolism. The Jews did this to the story of Jonah because it was inconceivable to them that it could be taken literally. It is in the context of the revelation concerning the city of God that this warning is given: “If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his share in the tree of life and the holy city which are described in this book” (22:19). There can be no doubt that if the city of God is literal, the rejection, and substitution of it for something metaphorical, would be tantamount to taking it away from the words of the book of this prophecy.

COMPREHEND - THE BREADTH, LENGTH, HEIGHT AND DEPTH

As we shall see, the apostle Paul was caught up to the city of God in vision and heard unspeakable words which he would not or could not utter. Among the words he heard may have been the measurements of the city. If so, it is not difficult to understand him being reticent about giving utterance to them in view of the mind boggling dimensions. The privilege of that utterance was reserved for the apostle John and had to wait to form the climax to the Word of God.

However, the apostle Paul did say at a later date after his vision that the prayer of the Christians should be that we “may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth and height,” and remember that “God can do exceeding abundantly above what we can ask or think” (Eph. 3:18-20). Abraham had the right attitude: He staggered not at God’s promises through unbelief.

In seeking to understand the significance of the length and breadth,

depth and height of the city of God, we certainly need to guard against being influenced by our own finite thinking, and keep in mind that God can do exceeding abundantly above what we can ask or think.

PREPARED AS A BRIDE ADORNED FOR HER HUSBAND

Adam Clarke says the description of the city of God in Rev. 21 was never intended to be literally understood, and the majority of Bible commentators adopt the same attitude. The most popular view is that the new Jerusalem is symbolic of the bride of Christ (the church).

The reason for drawing this conclusion is because Rev. 21:2 refers to the city being “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” But this statement does not declare that the city is the bride, but rather that the city is beautifully adorned like a bride. In Biblical times, brides were adorned with jewels (Isa. 61:10), so the adornment of the city of God is compared with the adornment of a bride.

The same Greek word “kosmeo,” translated “prepared” in Rev. 21:2 is translated “garnished” in v19 and means decorated, adorned, ornamented, and refers to the foundations of the wall of the city which consist of precious stones, and the gates are pearl. The city itself and the main street is pure translucent gold. The word is translated “adorn” in 1 Tim. 2:9 in relation to women adorning themselves with gold, pearls and expensive apparel. It is also translated “adorned” in Lk. 21: 5 in relation to the temple at Jerusalem in New Testament times being “adorned with goodly stones.”

If the apostles exclaimed: “Behold, what manner of stones and what manner of buildings” in relation to Herod’s temple (Mk. 13:1. Lk. 21:5), what will be said when the true temple appears in view of its beautiful adornment?!

We read in 1 Chr.29:2-8 that David prepared “all manner of precious stones” for the temple in his day and numerous precious stones were contributed by the Israelites for the same purpose. When Solomon finally built the temple, all these jewels and gems were used to adorn and decorate the walls (2 Chron. 3:6). In view of the fact that it was a model of the temple city of God, it is not surprising to discover in Rev. 21 that the city is adorned with precious stones.

Hints of the glorious adornment of the new Jerusalem are given in a number of prophecies in the book of Isaiah. Chapter 52:1 for example: “Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city...” Isa. 54:11-12: “...O Jerusalem... I

will set your stones in antimony, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of agate, your gates of carbuncles, and all your walls of precious stones.” Isa. 61:10 refers to Jerusalem being clothed and adorned “as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.” This is very similar to the statement made in Rev. 21:2 which likens the adornment of the holy city to “a bride adorned for her husband.”

FALSE MODESTY

Many commentators maintain that the gold, precious stones and pearls in the city of God were never intended to be literally understood because such things and anything of monetary value can have no place in the spiritual eternal world. This is false reasoning. God is not concerned about the monetary value man places upon gold and jewels and did not create them for this purpose, but for His own glory and pleasure. Carnal man has misused and abused them for his own glory but it is evident that God uses them for glory and beauty in His city. Why should the city be drab and colourless? Surely it is evident in God’s creation - in the flowers, birds, butterflies, fish, snakes, gems, sunsets etc that He loves colour.

Another reason for some concluding that the city is symbolic of the bride of Christ is because when the angel told John that he would show him the bride, he showed him the city descending (Rev. 21:9-10). But if we were to read elsewhere that a certain person told another person that he was going to arrange for him to see or meet a certain bride, and then we read that he took him to a certain city, would we conclude that the city was the bride and that there was no real literal city involved at all? Would we not rather conclude that the city was the residence of the bride and that to see her he needed to be taken there? Rev. 22:14 makes it clear that the church is not the city but enters the city. Also 21:27. When the city descends, the church will have been caught up into it to meet Jesus in the air at his second coming as we read in 1 Thes. 4:16-17.

The city is the city of the great king - the bridegroom, and the bride will dwell there with him. Until he returns and gathers those who make up his bride from the four corners of the earth, the complete bride would not be able to be seen in one place. In order to see the bride in one place, John was taken to the city where she will be gathered by the angels (Matt. 24:31).

But, when John saw the city he was so awe-struck with its size,

shape, glory and splendour, he became completely focussed on it and the detailed account he had to write about it.

CONFUSION BETWEEN CITY AND COMMUNITY

To conclude that the reference to the bride of Christ and the city of God means the city is a community of people and does not involve a literal physical city, would be as wrong as concluding that the great whore and “that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth” in Rev. 17 only refers to a community of people and does not involve a literal city.

The angel (“one of the 7 angels who had the 7 vials”) who talked with John saying: “Come hither, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife,” was the same angel who talked with John earlier saying: “Come hither; I will show you the judgement of the great whore” (Rev. 17:1). When John was carried away in the Spirit he “saw a woman” (v3) who symbolized the great whore. She represented of course the apostate church which is a spiritual fornicator, and “the bride, the Lamb’s wife” represents the true and pure church which is “a chaste virgin.” It is appropriate that the same angel showed John these 2 contrasting communities and their ultimate destiny.

If it was stated in Rev. 21 that “the bride, the Lamb’s wife is that great city of God which will reign over the kings of the earth,” it would be regarded by many as proof positive that the city is the church community and not a literal city, and it would be difficult to argue against it. But Rev. 21 does not make that kind of statement. It simply states that the angel told John to come with him to see the bride and he took him and showed him the city. It does not say that the bride is the city. This conclusion is an assumption and has to be read into it. It is just as easy to read it to mean the bride is in the city.

However, as far as the “woman” in Rev. 17:3 is concerned, which most expositors regard as the apostate church, it is stated in v18 that she “is that great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.” But nobody has concluded that the city refers to the apostate church and not a literal city. The majority believe it refers to the city of Rome, which is the power base of the apostate community - the place of the Papal throne upon which their “anointed one” and “holy father” the Pope sits. Likewise, “that great city, the holy Jerusalem” is the power base of the true church - the place of the throne of Father God and His anointed one, Christ Jesus. The inseparable link between each community and their respective cities is quite apparent. As pointed out before, by metonymy a city can refer to its

inhabitants, but in reality the inhabitants are quite a separate and distinct entity from the literal physical city. Failure to recognize this would result in eliminating the city of Rome from Rev. 17 and has resulted in many eliminating the city of God from Rev. 21.

It is certainly made clear by the references in Rev. 17:6, 16 to the harlot woman being drunk with the blood of the saints and of her flesh being burned by fire, that she does not only signify a city. A city without a community cannot shed blood and does not have flesh to be burned!

We read in Rev. 18:15-19 that the great city of the harlot “was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones and pearls.” These words are generally accepted as referring to the rich adornment of the city of Rome, particularly the Vatican city. The same adornment is also applied to the church of Rome in Rev. 17:4: “And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls.” But very few, if any, would confuse the city with the church and claim that they are one and the same.

The city of God in Rev. 21 which is pure gold and has foundations adorned with precious stones, gates made of pearl and the street made of pure translucent gold, is obviously contrasted with the great harlot city, whose “great riches” will “come to nought in one hour” (Rev. 18:17). But such a contrast cannot be made if only the harlot’s city is regarded as being a literal city and the city of God is regarded as being symbolical. If there is no difficulty accepting the harlot’s city with its gold, precious stones and pearls literally, why not the city of God? If it be argued that the book of Revelation is all symbolic so the gold etc mentioned in connection with the city of God must be treated symbolically, then to be consistent, the same rule should apply to the gold etc mentioned in connection with the harlot’s city.

A SPARKLING RADIANT CITY

The 375 mile square city radiates the glory of God and sparkles like a giant chandelier, “having the glory of God, and her light was like a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal” (Rev. 22:11).

In Rev. 4:3 the glory of God Himself is likened to the jasper, and v6 refers to a sea of glass like crystal before His throne. The stone described in Rev. 22:11 as “a jasper stone, clear as crystal” speaks of a perfectly transparent jasper as unclouded as the brightest crystal, radiating all the

colours of the rainbow. Some believe it could refer to the diamond. The city is ablaze with brilliant sparkling, pulsating colour as it reflects the glory of God.

“And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it and the Lamb is the lamp of it” (v23). (Ps. 84:11).

Night never occurs in the city due to the glory of God being an everlasting light and the Lamb an eternal lamp. There will therefore be no need for a lamp or the sun or moon. This doesn't mean that the sun and moon will no longer shine. It is evident from Ps. 72:11 that they will. Mortals need day and night so there will still be days and nights in the new earth. But they will be of surpassing glory due to the new heavens which will involve the removal of all air pollution: “The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold...” (Isa. 30:26). Air pollution will be so bad in the end time that when the new heavens are created and the sunlight returns to normal, it will be 7 times brighter than what it was.

The holy of holies in the tabernacle and temple had no natural or artificial light. It was lit only on the day of atonement, by the glory of God, as a result of the sacrifice for sin being offered. So the uninterrupted glory of God in the city-temple of God indicates the putting away of sin for all time, through the blood of the Lamb.

If Moses' face shone as a result of God's glory passing by with his back turned, imagine the bright faces of all who will behold God face to face every day!

The A.V. says the Lamb is the “light” but the Greek word “luchnos” according to Strong, means a portable lamp. It is translated “candle” in Mk. 4:21. Jn. 5:35. Rev. 18:23. 22:5. It is also translated “light” in 2 Pet. 1:19.

Lamps were used in houses in Biblical times to give light at night, but the city of God won't need such lamps because Christ, who possesses and reflects the glory of God, is the lamp. The way in which Rev. 21:23 likens the glory of God to the sun, and Christ to a lamp, implies the superiority and transcendent glory of Father God.

Rev. 21:21 says: “The street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.” The Greek word “plateia” translated “street” is the feminine of “platus” which means wide or broad and is translated “wide” in Matt. 7:13: “wide is the gate and broad is the way...” (Another similar word, “platos” is translated “breadth” in Rev. 20:9. 21:16. Eph. 3:18). In view of this, the “street of the city” in Rev. 21:21 is wide, broad and

spacious, which it would need to be in view of the millions who live in the city. The street will not be narrow or congested like the streets in some cities today.

Although the word “street” is here used in the singular, with the definite article “the” before it, it is not to be supposed that there is only one street in the city; for there are 12 gates, and there must of course be a street leading to each gate. But the street spoken of here is “the” street by way of distinction; it is the main street, or as the original word signifies, the broad way, the great avenue.

Every great city has its main street or avenue, and John sees that the holy city has its broad central avenue too. We shall see in Rev. 22:1-3 that the street turns out to be a boulevard with a river of living water running through its centre from the throne of God and the Lamb, and the tree of life stands in the midst of the river in the middle of the city, and adorns the banks of the river by sending branches over to both sides which yield fruit every month.

The street, like the city itself “was pure gold, like transparent (clear) glass” (v18, 21). As in the case of the wooden floors in the most holy place of the tabernacle and Solomon’s temple, which were overlaid with gold, the street in the city will also be pure clean gold. All the equipment of the outer court of the tabernacle was of brass, but the word of prophecy declared that “for brass I (God) will bring gold” (Isa. 60:17).

But how can gold be transparent? Reference to it being “like transparent glass” probably means it is so highly polished as to possess perfect powers of reflection, like a mirror. The effect of this would be grand and striking in the extreme. Think for a moment what the appearance of a street so paved would be. The gorgeous palaces on either side would be reflected beneath, not to mention the lustrous radiance of the beauty of the glory of the Lord. This is what gold was originally created for; not for the glory of man but for God, and it is fitting and appropriate that it should be used in the construction of the city of God. For this reason the most holy place in both the tabernacle and temple were overlaid with gold.

THE WALL

Verse 12 says the city “had a wall great and high,” and the measurement of it is given in v17: “a hundred and forty four cubits by man’s measurement, which the angel was using.”

The cubit is regarded as the distance in a normal adult from the elbow

to the finger tip, and is 18 to 20 inches, (though in Ezk. 40:5 and 43:13 it is larger by a hand breadth). This means the wall was around 216 to 240 feet, i.e. 66 to 73 metres high - as high as a 20 story building and therefore not easy to climb over! The purpose of the wall is no doubt to prevent those who have no right to enter the city from gaining access (v27. 22:14-15).

If the Israelites were over-awed by the cities of the Anakim which were “walled up to heaven,” it is not surprising that our minds should boggle at this city and its wall. May lack of faith on our part to be able to enter such a city not prevent us from gaining access!

Rev. 21:18 says the wall was made of jasper, which, as already mentioned, is regarded by some as the diamond. The New International Bible for example says: “The wall was made of diamond.” What a contrast to clay, brick, wood, and concrete! The light and colour reflected by the wall would therefore manifest the glory of God, sparkling and glistening with all the colours of the rainbow. The city of God would be seen towering behind the radiance of the wall.

THE FOUNDATIONS

Rev. 21:19 says: “The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones.” This statement, taken by itself, could be taken to mean that a variety of precious ornamental stones were inserted here and there in each foundation stone. But the next statement: “The first foundation was jasper; the second sapphire...” reveals that each foundation consisted of one particular precious stone. There are 12 foundation stones upon which the wall sits, and they are divided up by the 12 gates. Reference therefore to “foundations... adorned with all manner of precious stones” means each of the 12 foundations consisted of a different precious stone.

The 12 different stones listed in Rev. 21:19-20 are as follows:

1. Jasper: Usually green with red veins. There are a number of varieties.
2. Sapphire: Deep sky blue, almost as transparent and glittering as a diamond.
3. Chalcedony: Several species; bluish white is the most common.
4. Emerald: Bright vivid green.
5. Sardonyx: A red and white stone.
6. Sardius: Vivid red.
7. Chrysolite: Yellow or gold.

8. Beryl: Sea green (bluish green).
9. Topaz: Some say pale green and others say rich yellow.
10. Chrysoprasus: Yellowish or golden green.
11. Jacinth: Deep red or violet or a blending of red and yellow.
12. Amethyst: Bright purple or violet.

Though the precise colours of these stones in some cases are not certain, the general picture described here is one of unmistakable beauty, designed to reflect the glory of God in a spectrum of brilliant colour. The light of the city within, shining through these various colours in the foundation of the wall, topped by the wall itself, composed of the crystal clear jasper (diamond?) creates a scene of dazzling beauty in keeping with the glory of God and the beauty of His holiness. This city is undoubtedly far more beautiful to the eye than anything man has ever seen. He has never been able, and will never be able to create anything like this. It reflects not only the infinite wisdom and power of God, but also His love and grace by receiving into it all His sons and daughters.

The 12 stones that make up the foundations are nearly the same as those on the breastplate of judgement which the high priest of Israel wore when he went into the holy of holies. These stones were like signets, for each one was inscribed with a name of one of the tribes of Israel (Ex. 28:15-21). The foundation stones in Rev. 21 however, are inscribed with the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb, but the gates are inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel (Rev. 21:12-14). If John saw the names of the 12 apostles written on the foundations, he must have seen his own name. What a thrill that would be, assuring him of a place in the eternal city!

Obviously astronomical quantities of gold, precious stones and pearls would be required to build a 375 mile square cubical city. This is too much for the faith of some to handle. They imagine that God could not find such quantities. They are earth-bound in their thinking, limiting the resources available to God to what is available on planet earth. They do not believe that He can do exceedingly abundantly above what they can ask or think. If necessary, God can create a whole planet out of gold, diamond or pearl! An article in a newspaper in May 1998 reported that a star has been located in the constellation of Centaurus with a massive density, thought to be made up primarily of carbon and oxygen in a crystallised state, which would make it a diamond with a blue-green tint. This truly would be a diamond in the sky larger than a planet!

THE GATES

The wall has 12 gates, 3 on each side, and an angel stands guard at each gate. The gates are made of pearl and inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. These names will be a memorial of Israel's privileged position as the custodian and channel of the Word of God and our indebtedness to it and them (Ps. 147:19-20. Rom. 3:1-2. 9:1-5).

The basis of all the measurements connected with the city is Israelitish, based on the number 12, because "the hope of Israel" (Act. 28:20) is the basis of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by which people are redeemed and gain entrance to the city.

The 1½ mile square city in Ezekiel's prophecy, called "Yahweh Shamah" (Ezk. 48:35), which is some miles south of Jerusalem and will be used to accommodate the mortal worshippers, also has 12 gates inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes. The names are recorded in Ezk. 48:31-34, 3 on each side of the four square city, starting on the north side and working around clockwise to the east, south and west. The order is different from any other given in Scripture and is as follows: Reuben, Judah, Levi, Joseph, Benjamin, Dan, Simeon, Isaachar, Zebulun, Gad, Asher, Naphtali. Some have suggested that this same order may apply to the gates in the city-temple but there is no evidence for this. Rev. 21 does not put names on the gates.

Isa. 60:18 refers to walls being called Salvation and the gates Praise. All who enter the gates into the city will certainly be participants of the salvation of God and will have joy in their heart and praise on their lips. As they enter they will be singing: "I will enter His gates with thanksgiving in my heart, I will enter His courts with praise" (Ps. 100:4).

TWELVE ANGELS AT THE GATES

Up until Rev. 21 we have been presented with 7 angels, but now, for the first time, we are introduced to 12, who are at the 12 gates (v12). (Jesus referred to "more than 12 legions of angels" Matt. 26:53).

According to 2 Chr. 23:19 guards were posted at the gates of Solomon's temple to prevent anyone or anything unclean from entering. And, according to Rev. 21:25-27 the gates of the holy city will never be shut, and nothing that defiles or abominates will be able to enter. This suggests that the angels act as guards at the gates, allowing the saints free access to the city, but barring the way to intruders. For those who are refused entry, "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out” (Lk. 13:28).

Reference to the angels guarding the way into the city-paradise of God, in the midst of which is the tree of life, calls to mind Gen. 3:24 which refers to the cherubim being posted at the entrance to the garden of Eden with a flaming sword preventing access to the tree of life. Will the 12 angels who guard the gates into the city have swords? No reference is made to weapons in their hands.

Although the angels will not be rulers in the earth (Heb. 2:5), they still have duties and ministries to perform in relation to the city of God. We see them many times in the book of Revelation, around the throne in the temple-city praising and worshipping God with the saints. It is their home as well as the saints.

In Biblical times, judges sat in the gate-house of their cities, settling disputes and dispensing justice. In the light of this, the following statement of Jesus to his 12 apostles could be significant: “...when the son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, you also shall sit upon 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28). Could this mean that each of the 12 apostles will have their throne in the gate next to the foundation inscribed with their name, and judge the tribe whose name is inscribed on the gate?

Ps. 122 could be relevant to this: “I was glad when they said to me, let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is built to be a city that is bound firmly together, to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord. For there thrones for judgement are set, the thrones of the house of David...”

EACH GATE WAS A PEARL

“**A**nd the 12 gates were 12 pearls, each gate was made of a single pearl” (Rev. 21:21).

The word “gates” comes from the Greek word “pulon” and according to Strong, can signify a porch or vestibule. It is translated “porch” in Matt. 26:71. Vine says it can also signify the gate tower of a walled town. In ancient times, the gate of a city was a building in itself like a tower where elders would meet and sit to discuss legal matters. A “gate” was not merely a door on a hinge out in the open, like a farm gate. In view of the fact that the gates in the city wall will never be shut (Rev. 21:25), there would be no need to have a gate in the sense of a door that closes. “Gate”

is therefore more likely to mean gateway, involving a structure.

Adam Clarke's response to the reference to each gate being made out of a single pearl is: "This must be merely figurative, for it is contrary to nature to produce a pearl large enough to make a gate to such an immense city." This reasoning is completely contrary to a true son of Abraham, and yet it is unfortunately too common among those who profess to be the seed of Abraham. As mentioned before: if God wanted to, He could create a whole planet out of pearl. If we were to only accept the things in Scripture which are according to nature, we would end up with a Bible without any miracles and without a wonder-working supernatural God. Many have denied themselves the city of God because of this.

Pearls, like diamonds and other precious stones, radiate colour and would add to the spectacle of dazzling glistening colour around the city wall. The colour of a pearl in the natural world is determined by the oyster's environment, so that different areas of the world's seas are noted for producing special colours. There are bronze tinted pearls from the Gambier islands, pale rose pearls from the Bahamas, black pearls from the Gulf of Mexico.

Pearl may not only be used in the gates of the city wall; it may also be used in the city itself. Ivory will also be used because Ps. 45:8 refers to Messiah and his fellows being in "ivory palaces" where stringed instruments will be played and make hearts glad. This verse even mentions that the garments of the king will smell like "myrrh, aloes and cassia."

Rev. 21 is just a brief summary of the design and structure of the city. Many books would no doubt be required to give a detailed description of every feature in this huge city, and some would probably be too difficult to describe and too amazing to comprehend. The little that has been revealed is difficult enough for some to receive without revealing more!

THE CITY IS SEPARATE AND DISTINCT FROM THE CHURCH

From a human point of view it is certainly a challenge to believe the city is literal, but it is very difficult to apply this city to the church. Many attempts have been made to spiritualize it all away, but none of them are very convincing. I am yet to come across a satisfactory explanation as to how a 375 mile square cubical city can be the church.

If the 12,000 furlongs is not literal, why is this particular measurement given, and what is it supposed to signify? If the intention in

using 12,000 furlongs is simply to convey the concept of a cube, why, and why use this particular measurement? Why not 2,000 or 1,000? Why not just one furlong? One furlong could be used just as effectively to signify a cube as 12,000!

If we regard the description of the city as being exclusively metaphorical, and spiritualize it all away into aerial nothingness, how unmeaning, yea, even bordering on folly, do these descriptions become. How can a wall 144 cubits high with 12 gates and 12 angels standing at the gates be the church? It would be absurd to speak of the church in such terms.

If the city is the church, how do we explain the fact that reference is made to the throne of God and of the Lamb being in it, as well as a street, the tree of life and a river? (Rev. 22:1-2).

There are a number of reasons for believing that the church is separate and distinct from the city of God:

1. Rev. 20:9 refers to armies coming up against “the camp of the saints, and the beloved city.” A distinction is made here between the church and the city. It is evident that the city is the dwelling place of the church, not the church itself.

2. Rev. 21:27 and 22:14 say those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life will be permitted to enter through the gates into the city. This clearly teaches that the church is not the city, but enters the city. Statements such as this make it difficult to equate the city with the church.

3. The same distinction between the city and the church can be seen in Heb. 12:22 where a list of the prospects of the Christian hope is given as “Mount Zion; the city of the living God - the heavenly Jerusalem; an innumerable company of angels in high festival, and the church”

4. Can it be seriously believed that when we read that Abraham lived in tents rather than a city, for he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God, that it means he was looking for the church? He and his company were the church. The statement relates to the place where Abraham hoped to live, not the people with whom he would live. The contrast is clearly between tents and the larger more durable structure of a city, not between a small company of people and the larger company of saints, although that can be inferred.

5. When Abraham and his “seed” - the multitudinous body of Christ, involving many millions of people, are gathered together to Zion in the promised land to sit down or recline for the marriage supper, where are they going to sit - out in the paddocks? No! Paddocks are for tents and Abraham will not be reverting to that form of habitation. He and his seed

will have the city of God. They certainly will not be waiting for the nations to come together at Jerusalem to build a temple before they can sit down with Christ for the marriage supper!

6. The reference in Rev. 22:1-2 to the river of water issuing forth from the throne of God in the city, flowing down the middle of the street, and the tree of life standing in the middle of it, is clearly reminiscent of the garden of Eden. The fact that Rev. 22 teaches that the tree of life is in the midst of the city, and Rev. 2:7 says the tree is in the midst of the paradise of God, reveals that the city is paradise - a garden city. The garden of Eden was a type or foreshadow of the city of God.

Could anyone possibly confuse the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve? Would anyone argue that the garden was not literal reality - that Adam and Eve were the garden? The garden was the place where they lived, and paradise, the garden city of God, is the place where Christ, (the second Adam) and his wife (the church) will live. Adam and Eve were not the paradise and neither will be Christ and his church!

Paradise is the city of God. More to the point: the city of God is heaven.

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CHAPTER TWO THE CITY OF GOD IS HEAVEN

The only other places in the Bible besides Rev. 21 where the length, breadth and height of a structure are equal, forming a cube, are in Ex. 26:15-25 and 1 Kng. 6:19-20. These verses relate to the tabernacle built in the days of Moses and the temple in Solomon's day. The most holy place in each structure was a cube; the length, breadth and height were equal. This is no coincidence but very significant in relation to the city of God.

The temple replaced the tabernacle and was an enlarged and glorified edition of it. During the days of both the tabernacle and temple, the high priest went into the most holy place once a year with the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkled it on the lid of the ark of the covenant (the "mercy seat") to make atonement for sins.

According to the New Testament, this ritual was a type pointing forward to the day when Jesus would offer himself up as a sacrifice, shed his blood as an atonement for sin and enter into heaven itself as a result. We read this in Heb. 9:24: "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."

We are clearly told here that the holy places in the tabernacle and temple were "figures" i.e. representations or counterparts of heaven.

Again we read in Heb. 8:1-2 that "We have a high priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens, a minister of the holies (sanctuary) and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man," (i.e. whose builder and maker is God).

Here again we are told that heaven is the true holy of holies and that it is the true tabernacle. The word "true" means heaven is the reality represented by the tabernacle. (Compare Jn. 6:32. 15:1 and 1 Jn. 2:8 where Jesus is referred to as the true bread, true wine and true light. In these places the word "true" carries with it the idea of antitype).

Heb. 8:5 says the tabernacle and its service was only an example and shadow (rough outline) of things in heaven. The writer then goes on to explain that this was implied when Moses was instructed by God to make the tabernacle according to the pattern shown to him at Mount Sinai.

The Greek word for "pattern" is "tupos" which means ensample, resemblance, model, type. Acts 7:44 says Moses made the tabernacle "according to the fashion (tupos) he had seen." And Ps. 78:69 says "He built His sanctuary like high heavens."

Heb. 9:23 says the tabernacle and all that pertained to it was a pattern

of things in the heavens. The Greek word for “pattern” on this occasion is “hupodeigma” and means an exhibit for imitation; specimen, copy.

The word “figure” is used in Heb. 9:9 which is “parabole” in the Greek and is elsewhere translated “parable.” It means similitude, comparison and usually relates to earthly things which have a heavenly significance and reality. The tabernacle was a living parable of heaven.

The word “shadow” occurs in Heb. 10:1 and is explained in the same verse to mean “not the very image.” A shadow is a faint, rough outline or representation of a physical reality.

We are told in Act. 7:44 that the tabernacle was “the tabernacle of witness.” It certainly was, for it witnessed and testified to greater things in heaven.

All these words used to describe the purpose of the tabernacle, saying it was an example, pattern, figure, shadow, witness etc of heaven, teach us that it was an earthly copy - an inferior replica or scale model - an inanimate miniature of heaven. Heaven is “a greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with (human) hands” (Heb. 9:11).

THE TABERNACLE OF GOD

In view of the most holy place in the tabernacle and temple being a cube, it is obviously significant that not only is the city of God a cube, but is also called the tabernacle of God, the temple of God and heaven.

For example, when John saw the holy city descending to earth he heard a voice saying: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them” (Rev. 21:2-3). Similar sentiments are expressed in Ezk. 37:26-27: “I will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle shall be with them” Also see Ps. 15:1. 61:4. 76:1-2. Isa. 33:20.

The tabernacle of God is also referred to in Rev. 13:6 in connection with “those who dwell in heaven.” “Tabernacle of God” is used here synonymously with “heaven.”

Rev. 15:5 in the Authorised Version refers to “the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven.” Other translations render it “the temple, the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven,” or “the temple, that is the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven.” This conveys the sense of the temple and tabernacle being one and the same thing, namely, heaven.

Heaven is referred to as God’s temple in both the Old and New Testament. See 2 Sam. 22:7. Ps. 5:7. 11:4. 18:6. Hab. 2:20. Rev. 11:19. 14:15, 17. 15:5, 6, 8. 16:1, 17.

“There came a great voice out of the temple of heaven from the throne (Rev. 16:17). “The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord’s throne is in heaven” (Ps. 11:4). “Heaven is my throne” (Isa. 66:1). These and other Scriptures testify that God’s throne is in heaven. Reference to the throne being in the holy city in Rev. 22:1-3 suggests therefore that it is heaven, for Father God only has one throne in heaven. The throne in heaven and the throne in the city are one and the same.

A MOBILE CITY AND THRONE

Millions of angels live with God in heaven and Jesus sits at his right hand. Heaven is clearly a place not just empty space. It is not something ethereal or spectral. The Father, son and angels are not floating on clouds or cosmic dust in space without any fixed abode.

Ps. 103:19 says the Lord “prepared His throne in the heavens.” The word prepared means “set up,” and is used frequently in the sense of to make or create. For example, 1 Kng. 5:18 refers to workmen who “prepared” timber and stones to build Solomon’s temple. Chapter 6:19 goes on to say Solomon “prepared” the oracle, i.e. the most holy place which housed the ark of the covenant which represented God’s throne in heaven.

Reference to God preparing His throne in heaven likewise indicates that it is a physical throne He made or created for Himself. It is not a mere metaphor neither is it something ethereal or spectral. It is something that can be sat upon - solid, substantial and transportable.

Many Christians do not stop to think or enquire or search Scripture for an understanding of the nature of heaven. Subconsciously many think of it in terms of another planet. But it is not a planet, it is a city - a mobile city which involves a mobile throne. No wonder the city is so mind-boggling in size and grandeur and is of dazzling beauty! What else would you expect of heaven?! Planets and stars are in a fixed orbit and restricted as to the amount of space they can traverse, not to mention the speed at which they can travel. Planets are regularly plunged into darkness due to revolving on their axis. But heaven, the city of God, is not in a fixed orbit and is not restricted in its movements or in the speed of its movements, and it certainly is never plunged into darkness. God is “the Father of lights with whom is no darkness due to turning” (Jam. 1:17), and His everlasting light fills heaven with light.

The mobility of heaven is seen in the city of God descending to earth in Rev. 21:2, 10. This could be one of the reasons for it being called a

“tabernacle.” In Greek the word is “skene” and means tent. A tent is a moveable and transportable dwelling, but a temple is a fixed and solid structure. The city of God is both of these; it is a solid structure and it is also moveable, and is therefore called both a temple and tabernacle.

EZEKIEL’S VISION OF CHERUBIM AND THRONE

The mobile nature of the city and throne of God is indicated in a number of places.

Ezekiel chapter one refers to a vision or revelation that the prophet had of the glory of God. He saw the 4 living creatures which are referred to in Rev. 4 standing in the immediate presence of God around His throne.

But Ezekiel also saw a wheel alongside each living creature, making 4 wheels altogether. The wheels were not ordinary wheels. Each one was a wheel within a wheel, i.e. each wheel had another wheel intersecting it at right angles, enabling them to travel in any direction without swerving. The size and height of the wheels was “dreadful,” i.e. awesomely huge - mind-boggling in size compared to normal wheels. They gleamed and sparkled like a radiant jewel, and the rims were full of eyes.

Wheels and eyes signify mobility and perception or insight.

When the living creatures moved or ascended, the wheels alongside them moved with them without revolving.

A divine chariot or vehicle is conveyed in this vision.

The 4 living creatures are referred to as “Cherubim” in Ezk. 10. Some believe that they refer to the redeemed and glorified saints, but Scripture makes a distinction between the saints and the 4 living creatures, not to mention the 24 elders. For example, Rev. 7:9-10 depicts the saints standing before the throne praising and thanking God, then verses 11-12 go on to refer to the angels, 24 elders and 4 living creatures worshipping God. They are clearly separate and distinct from the saints. Also see Rev. 14:1-3. 19:4-7.

The 4 living creatures, being in the immediate presence of God around the throne, are clearly very high-ranking angels if not the highest.

The suggestion that Ezekiel’s vision of the wheels alongside the cherubim conveys the concept of a divine chariot or vehicle, calls to mind a statement in 1 Chr. 28:18 which refers to “the chariot of the cherubim.” In this particular verse the “chariot” refers to the ark of the covenant in Solomon’s temple of which figures of the cherubim formed a part, standing at each end with wings outstretched.

The ark of the covenant represented God’s throne. Being mobile, and

leading God's armies of Israel into battle, it was thought of as a chariot.

In fact, as it was carried, with the wings of the cherubim outstretched, it gave the impression of the cherubim bearing or transporting the throne. Hence the phrase "chariot of the cherubim."

The concept of the cherubim transporting the throne is significant in the light of Ezk. 1. Verse 22 says an awesome, awe-inspiring firmament that sparkled like crystal, radiating all the colours of the rainbow, was above the heads of the cherubim and above the wheels, like a dome or ceiling. And above that, according to verse 26, was a throne like a sapphire stone, (Ezk. 10:1 repeats this) and upon the throne a radiant divine being.

So then, the crystal firmament, being above the cherubim, was like a dome or ceiling to them. But to the One on the throne above this, the firmament would be a floor or pavement. Wherever the cherubim and wheels went, the firmament and throne went with them. This clearly conveys to us a mobile throne, borne by the cherubim. Ultimately, as we read in Ezk. 43:1-7, the throne comes to dwell on earth. Dan. 7:9 refers to it: "His throne is fiery flames and its wheels burning fire."

Now, regarding the firmament or pavement of crystal under the throne, Rev. 4:6 refers to what appeared to be a "sea of glass like crystal before the throne." Being like a "sea of glass like crystal" suggests the colour of sparkling blue sapphire. Who could fail to see the connection between this and the firmament like crystal before the throne in Ezk. 1?

This would mean that the cherubim in Ezk. 1 transported Yahweh and His throne from heaven, along with the crystal-looking pavement (divine platform) upon which or above which the throne sits. This reveals that the throne can leave the city and be transported without it, as in the case of the ark of the covenant which could be conveyed to another place without the temple having to go with it. The ark of the covenant was not a fixture, cemented or bolted to the floor of the tabernacle or temple, and neither is the throne of God in heaven. Reference in Rev. 4:2 to the throne being "set" (placed, positioned) in heaven confirms this.

A PAVEMENT OF SAPPHIRE STONE

With these thoughts in mind, we go to Ex. 24. When God gathered Israel to Sinai, He invited Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu (Aaron's sons) and 70 elders up the mountain to worship Him "afar off" (at a distance). Moses alone was allowed to draw near, but not the others.

Verses 9-10 say they went up and “saw the God of Israel, and under His feet there was what appeared to be a pavement of sapphire stone, clear blue like the heavens” (i.e. like the firmament of heaven).

This pavement of sapphire stone under God’s feet is the sea of glass in Rev. 4:6 and the firmament like crystal in Ezk. 1, on which or above which is the throne of God.

There is no reference to the throne in Ex. 24:10 but it would not be surprising if it was there, along with the cherubim, not to mention other angels, for we read in Ps. 68:17 that “the chariots of God are 20,000, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the holy place.”

We have also seen in Heb. 12:22 that “an innumerable company of angels” is identified with “the city of the living God,” and they are seen around the throne of God in Rev. 5:11.

It is not impossible that the whole city travelled to Sinai and hovered above, for which reason there was thick cloud to prevent the people from seeing it (Ex. 19:9, 16).

In Ex. 19:10-11 we read that the Lord told Moses to tell the people to sanctify themselves because “Yahweh will come down ...” The following verses reveal that when Yahweh came, “there were thunders and lightning and the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud.” Mount Sinai was covered with smoke and the whole mount quaked violently, causing the people to tremble.

Significantly enough; thunder, lightning, smoke, earthquake and a trumpet voice are also mentioned in connection with the throne and temple of God in Revelation (4:1-5. 8:4. 11:19. 15:8).

GOD RIDES UPON THE HEAVENS

Some may find the concept of God riding through the heavens on His throne or in His city as rather bizarre. But Scripture plainly teaches this: “There is none like the God of Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, and in His majesty through the skies” (Deu. 33:26). “Sing unto God, sing praises to His name; extol Him who rides upon the heavens by His name Yah, and rejoice before Him” (Ps. 68:4). “Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth; O sing praises to the Lord, to Him who rides upon the heavens ...” (Ps. 68:32-33). “He bowed the heavens and came down: thick darkness was under His feet. And He rode upon a cherub, and did fly; yea, He did fly upon the wings of the wind” (Ps. 18:9-10). (The “wings of the wind” refers to angels Ps. 104:3-4). “Thou didst

ride upon Thine horses and Thy chariots of salvation” (Hab. 3:8). (The “horses and chariots” refer to angels. See Ps. 68:17. 2 Kng. 6:17. Zech. 6). Reference is made in Mic. 1:2-3 to the Lord coming down to earth “out of His place” from “His holy temple.” This is what Ezekiel saw (Ezk. 1).

It would also not be surprising if the city of God visited and hovered above planet earth during creation week, during which the angels shouted for joy as they beheld the wonderful creative works of God taking place, creating order and beauty out of chaos (Job. 38:4-7). (The Hebrew word translated “moved” in Gen. 1:2 in relation to the creative spirit of God, means “brooded” which is consistent with the concept of hovering).

In view of the size and brightness of the city, it could easily have provided light for the earth during the first few days until the light of the sun and moon appeared on the 4th day. Due to the earth revolving on its axis, night and day would occur while the city cast its light upon it.

MOSES SAW GOD

Coming back to the Sinai episode: the reference to Yahweh coming down is commonly understood to refer not to Yahweh Himself, but a high ranking angel representing Him. It is also commonly believed that the “Lord” (Yahweh) who allowed Moses to see His back but not His face, saying: “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live,” was also an angel. If so then Yahweh Himself could not have been at Sinai at all, which means His throne and city could not have been there either.

The question that needs to be asked is: why would Moses not be allowed to look at an angel’s face, and if it was an angel, which one was it? According to the throne room scene in Rev. 4, the highest ranking angels are the 4 living creatures which stand in the immediate presence of God around His throne. Then there are “the 7 spirits of God” standing before the throne who are the 7 angels referred to in Rev. 8:1 who “stood before God” and who blow the 7 trumpets. The fact that the last trumpet (7th) is associated with an “archangel” (1 Thes. 4:16. 1 Cor. 15:52), indicates the 7 angels are archangels. The name of one of them is given in Scripture: Michael (Jude v9). Dan. 10:13, 12:1 indicates archangels are “chief princes.” Gabriel, being a high ranking angel, may have been an archangel also.

Further out from the throne of God surrounding the 4 living creatures and 7 spirits, are 24 elders, and beyond them multitudes of other angels. (Rev. 4:4. 5:11).

These 4 groups, the 4 living creatures, the 7 spirits, the 24 elders and

many thousands of angels represent the angelic hierarchy in heaven, in order of rank.

Who, then, among these, appeared to Moses whose face could not be seen? Ezekiel saw the faces of the 4 living creatures and so did John. John also saw the 7 angels. In view of the fact that archangels are chief princes, the angel who appeared to Joshua and referred to himself as “prince of the host of the Lord” (Josh. 5:14) is believed to be an archangel, probably Michael, and Joshua saw him!

Daniel, Zecharias and Mary spoke to Gabriel face to face. John also saw the 24 elders and spoke to some of them face to face (Rev. 5:5. 7:13).

The fact of the matter is that the face of angels belonging to all ranks in heaven have been seen by men. Therefore, it must have been Yahweh Himself whose back Moses was allowed to see but not His face. It is evident from Ex. 33:20 that the reference to no man being able to see Yahweh and live, means seeing His face.

The words of Jesus in Jn. 5:37: “You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape” are applied to the faithless Jews of his time, and cannot be applied to Moses.

Moses actually saw God - from behind! God Himself was at Sinai as many Scriptures testify. Moses did not ascend Sinai to worship an angel, and it was not the presence of an angel that caused his face to shine. Many men have been in the presence of an angel, but there is no reference to their face glowing as a result. It is not difficult therefore, to believe that God’s throne or city or both were there hidden and concealed above the thick clouds and smoke.

The question is: if the city of God was there, did Moses see it? The apostle John saw it and so did the apostle Paul. There is therefore no reason why Moses could not see it also.

Moses was up Mt Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights and God told him to “make a sanctuary according to the pattern I will show you.” According to Gesenius the Hebrew word translated “pattern” can mean structure, exemplar, model.

STRIKING RESEMBLANCES BETWEEN THE TABERNACLE AND CITY

Whether the pattern according to which Moses built the tabernacle was the city of God itself or a model of it, it is clear that the tabernacle and the divinely constituted camp of Israel, bear a striking resemblance to the aspects and features seen by John in the city of God.

Description after description of heaven's "tabernacle" or temple in the book of Revelation, recalls the tabernacle and temple built by Moses and Solomon. Examples are as follows:-

1. As we have seen, both the city of God and sanctuary built by Moses and Solomon are called "tabernacle" and "temple." They are also both called "the tabernacle of the testimony" (Num. 1:50, 53. Rev. 15:5).

2. Heaven's city - temple "lieth foursquare" (Rev. 21:16). Israel's encampment around the tabernacle was also foursquare. But the city of God did not merely measure the same in length and breadth; it also measured the same in height making it a cube - a cubical city. The most holy place in the tabernacle and temple which represented heaven, were also a cube.

3. Doors led into the most holy place of Solomon's temple (1 Kng. 6:31). A door also leads into heaven (Rev. 4:1).

4. The doors and walls in the most holy place of Solomon's temple were decorated with carvings of trees and flowers (1 Kng. 6:29-35). The city of God is a garden city - paradise! (Rev. 22:1-2).

5. The city is pure gold (Rev. 21:18). All the boards inside the tabernacle and temple were overlaid with gold (Ex. 26:29. 1 Kng. 6:20-22, 30). Even all the drinking cups and utensils were solid gold (2 Chr. 9:20).

6. The city is adorned and decorated with precious stones. So was Solomon's temple (2 Chr. 3:6).

7. The city of God was surrounded by a wall with 3 gates on all 4 sides making a total of 12, and the gates were inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. A wall also surrounded the tabernacle and temple. The 12 tribes of Israel also surrounded the tabernacle on all 4 sides and were divided into groups of 3 on each side, corresponding to the city gates.

8. The ark of the covenant represented God's throne - the place where He was enthroned between or above the cherubim (Ex. 25:22. Ps. 80:1. 99:1. 2 Kng. 19:15). God's throne in Rev. 4:6 is also above the cherubim. (Also see Ezk. 1:26).

Cherubim were not only part of the seat of the ark of the covenant with wings outstretched over it, but also around it, carved in the walls and ceilings and sewn into the veil or curtain. The cherubim in Rev. 4:6 are also referred to as being "in the midst" and "round about" the throne.

Being situated in the holy place of the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant was in the midst of the foursquare encampment (Num. 5:3). In relation to the city, God's throne is also in the midst of it. We know this from the fact that the tree of life is in the midst (Rev. 2:7), and according

to 22:1-2, the throne of God is situated in that area as well.

Rev. 11:19 makes reference to the ark of the covenant: “And the temple was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His covenant: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings and an earthquake and great hail.”

The fact that these same lightnings and voices and thunderings proceed from the throne of God in Rev. 4:5, suggests the ark of the covenant and the throne are one and the same.

The same link can also be seen in Jer. 3:16-17 where it is stated that the time will come when Israel will no longer seek the ark of the covenant of the Lord, because Jerusalem shall be the throne of the Lord.

9. Reference to the bow around the throne in Rev. 4:3 indicates it is surrounded by a halo of glory. The shekinah glory also shone from the ark of the covenant.

10. There were 3 things inside the ark of the covenant that were a “testimony,” and all 3 were a testimony to Christ. They were:-

A. The law, which Christ loved and upheld, and by his knowledge and application of it, justified many (Isa. 53:11. Ps. 40:7-8).

B. The pot of manna, which pointed to Christ as the bread sent by God from heaven to give life to those who were prepared to believe and receive him as Messiah.

C. The rod that budded, which pointed to Christ’s resurrection which vindicated him as the divinely chosen and appointed redeemer and high priest.

Acts 7:44 refers to the tabernacle as a “tabernacle of witness,” which is appropriate from the point of view of being a witness to Christ. He is in fact, referred to as “the faithful and true witness” in Rev. 1:5. 3:14.

The fact that the ark represented the throne of God and the witness to Christ was inside, pointed to him being part of the throne, sharing it with his Father, sitting at His right hand.

This is further suggested by the fact that the blood of the sacrifice, which pointed to Christ’s sacrifice, was sprinkled on the seat of the ark each year. This taught that on the basis of his sacrifice, Christ would enter heaven and sit on the throne with his Father.

Rom. 3:25 says God has put forward Christ to be a propitiation. The Greek word for “propitiation” is translated “mercy seat” in Heb. 9:5, and refers to the seat of the ark of the covenant which the cherubim overshadowed. Christ’s connection and involvement with the throne of God is clearly conveyed in this. In Rev. 22:1 reference is made to the throne in the city being “the throne of God and of the Lamb.”

11. A golden altar of incense was in close proximity to the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle and temple. Reference is also made to a golden altar of incense in heaven in close proximity to the throne (Rev. 8:3. 9:13. 14:18. 16:7. Also Isa. 6:6).

A veil separated the altar of incense from the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle and temple. It represented the flesh (Heb. 10:20 i.e. the sinful nature of man) which prevented man from living eternally with God and His angels. But Christ conquered the flesh resulting in the veil being ripped down the middle from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51). By his obedient life and sacrifice he has opened up the way to eternal life and fellowship with God. There is therefore no veil or barrier of any kind for those who live in the city of God.

12. A 7 branched lampstand was in the tabernacle, and its lamps were always burning. Reference is also made to “7 lamps of fire burning before the throne” in the city of God (Rev. 4:5). They signify the 7 spirits of God.

13. A laver of water was situated in front of the tabernacle and temple and the one in front of the temple was so large it was called a “sea” (1 Kng. 7:23-44). This immediately invites comparison with the “sea of glass” before the throne in the city of God (Rev. 4:6).

14. Rev. 4:3 says “He who sat on the throne was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone.” The breastplate worn by the high priest of Israel when he stood before the ark of the covenant contained precious stones, and the jasper and sardine stones are mentioned first and last. (Ex. 28:15-20). According to Isa. 44:6. 48:12 God is the first and the last! Many of the stones that adorned the 12 foundations of the city wall correspond with the stones in the breastplate.

15. Reference is made in Rev. 4:4 to 24 elders sitting around the throne in heaven. Israel’s priesthood revolved around the throne of God in the tabernacle, and was formed into 24 orders or courses (1 Chr. 24:4-18). Priestly duties were rotated so that all the priests could have a turn at ministering in the presence of the Lord each year. This same principle could operate among the angels in heaven enabling them all to have a turn at sitting in the immediate presence of God, worshipping Him at close range around His throne. If so, when the saints are made equal to the angels, the same will apply to them.

16. When the tabernacle was consecrated by Moses, the glory of the Lord filled it and Moses was not able to enter because of it (Ex. 40:34-35). This also happened when Solomon dedicated the temple. Due to the cloud of the glory of the Lord filling the house, the priests could not enter to minister (1 Kng. 8:10-11. 2 Chr. 5:14).

Reference is also made in Rev. 15:8 to the city-temple being filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, preventing anyone from entering. Isa. 6:4 is similar: “the house was filled with smoke.”

These examples of features of the tabernacle corresponding with the city of God show that the tabernacle was built according to the pattern of the heavenly sanctuary - the holy city. The tabernacle and temple were clearly inferior replicas or models - miniatures of heaven, the city of God.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE CITY - MILLENNIAL OR POST MILLENNIAL?

Rev. 22:1-2 makes reference to the city of God coming down from God out of heaven at the time of “a new heaven and a new earth,” when “the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.” Some believe this teaches that the city comes at the end of the millennium and others believe it comes at the beginning.

In seeking an answer to this it is helpful to realize that the city of God is a garden city - paradise. This is evident in Rev. 22 where reference is made to the river of water of life proceeding from the throne, and the tree of life being in the midst. It is plainly stated in Rev. 2:7 that the tree of life is in the midst of paradise.

The Greek word “paradeisos,” translated “paradise” signifies a large pleasure garden with trees, or park. The Greek translation of the Old Testament uses the same word in Gen. 2:8 for the garden of Eden. Vine’s expository dictionary of New Testament words says paradeisos is of Persian origin and denotes a garden with a wall, such as the protected gardens of the Persian kings. This is significant in view of the fact that the city of God (paradise) is surrounded by a wall!

THE THIRD HEAVEN

Now, the Apostle Paul, like John, was caught up into paradise and had visions and revelations of the city, and he equates it with “the third heaven” (2 Cor. 12:1-4).

The question is, of course, what is the significance of the third heaven? Many believe that the atmospheric heaven is the first heaven, the planetary heaven is the second heaven, and the galactic heaven - the heaven of heavens is the third heaven.

But there is no Scriptural justification for this interpretation. Nowhere in the Bible is the atmosphere designated a “first heaven” etc. However, there is a clear enumeration of three heavens and earth in 2 Pet. 3:5-16, not in relation to space but time, i.e. in a chronological sense.

This is how it reads: “.... there were heavens and earth long ago (the first), created by God’s Word out of water and with water; and by water that first world was destroyed, the water of the deluge. And the present (second) heavens and earth, again by God’s Word, have been kept in store for burning; they are being reserved until the day of judgement when the godless will be destroyed. And here is my point, my friends, which you

must not lose sight of: with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. It is not that the Lord is slow in fulfilling His promise, as some suppose, but that He is very patient with you, because it is not His will for any to be lost, but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come; it will come unexpected as a thief. On that day the (second) heavens will disappear with a great rushing sound, the elements will disintegrate in flames, and the earth with all that is in it will be laid bare. Since these things will be dissolved, think what sort of people you ought to be, what devout and dedicated lives you should live! Look eagerly for the coming of the day of God and work to hasten it on; that day will set the (second) heavens ablaze until they fall apart, and will melt the elements in flames. But we have his promise, and look forward to new heavens (third) and a new earth, the home of justice. With this to look forward to, do your utmost to be found at peace with him, unblemished and above reproach in his sight. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience with us is our salvation, as Paul, our friend and brother, said when he wrote to you with inspired wisdom. And so he does in all his other letters (like 2 Cor. 12!) wherever he speaks of this subject" (of three heavens!) (New English Bible. Brackets mine).

In this passage, Peter enumerates three heavens and earth. The first was the original heavens and earth created long ago as recorded in Gen. 1. It refers to the antediluvian world or order of things which was destroyed by the flood in Noah's day. The Authorised Version Bible defines it as "the world that then was," and the New English Bible translates it "the first world."

Due to the windows of heaven being opened and the fountains of the earth bursting forth, dramatic changes took place in the atmosphere (heaven) and in the earth, and they were never the same again. The heaven and earth which had existed from the time of Adam to Noah (1656 years) "passed away" and was replaced by a different form or constitution.

2 Pet. 3 says that the heavens and earth which exist now, have been reserved for fire on the day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men. This is a reference to the second heavens and earth which are viewed as stretching from Noah's day after the flood to Peter's day right through to the second coming of Christ.

Jesus comes in flaming fire (2 Thes. 1:7-8) and in that day the atmosphere (heavens) and earth will be set ablaze and be purged of all the pollution of the material world of man, resulting in a new (third) purified heaven and earth. The "new" heavens and earth are clearly the "third" in order of time, not distance in space. The "first" was from Eden to the

flood. The “second” is from Noah to the second coming of Christ. And the “third” is from the second coming of Christ throughout eternity in the paradise of God.

This agrees with what we read in Lk. 23:42-43 concerning paradise. The thief on the cross said to Jesus “remember me when you come in your kingdom,” referring of course to his second coming. Jesus answered saying: “I can assure you this very day that you shall be with me in paradise.” Paradise comes when Jesus comes! This means the city of God comes at the beginning of the millennium not at the end.

It should be evident from this that the “new heaven and new earth” referred to in Rev. 21:1 is the “third.” When it says “the first heaven and the first earth were passed away,” the word “first” is better translated “former.” It comes from the Greek word “protos” which literally means the one before; the one that precedes. It is translated “former” in Rev. 21:4. The “former” heaven and earth that precedes the third is of course the second.

God also spoke through the prophet Isaiah saying: “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth” (Isa. 65:17). The fact that this prophetic declaration was made during the period of the second heavens and earth means it relates to the third phase - the same phase as Rev. 21:1.

Isaiah 65:17 goes on to say “the former (i.e. second heavens and earth) shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.” Why? Because as 2 Pet. 3:10 says, they shall pass away. And Isa. 65:18 directly relates the new heavens and new earth to Jerusalem, the city of God saying: “But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.”

Reference to “former” heavens and earth and the Lord “creating” “new” heavens and earth makes it clear that the former and new do not exist at the same time. The “new” cannot be in existence if they are yet to be created, and the “former” cannot exist if they pass away! This confirms that the phrase “third heaven” is to be understood in terms of time not space.

It also soon becomes evident in the following verses in Isa. 65 that it pertains to the millennium for it refers to a mortal population existing at the time. Verse 20 says “the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.” Verse 23 refers to children being born, and verse 25 refers to the wolf and the lamb feeding together.

Isa. 66:22 also refers to the new heavens and the new earth, and again makes it clear that it pertains to the millennial period when mortal flesh is still upon the earth. Verse 23 refers to “all flesh” coming to worship the

Lord from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another. Verse 24 continues saying: “And on their way out they will see the carcasses of those who have sinned against God; for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”

CONFIRMATION IN REVELATION

A careful reading of Rev. 21 and 22 confirms that the new heavens and earth encompasses the period of the millennium and that the city of God will be upon earth during that period, contemporary with the mortal population over whom Christ and the saints will reign.

Consider the following:-

1. We are told in Rev. 21:9 that the angel who took John to see the holy city descending was “one of the 7 angels who had the 7 vials.” The 7 vials, of course, relate to God’s judgements poured out upon the earth in the end time prior to the millennium (Rev. 16). This indicates that what John is about to see in relation to the city, relates to a time not long after the outpouring of the 7 vials, which is when the millennium commences.

2. According to Rev. 21:12-17 a wall over 200 feet high encircles the city with 12 gates at which angels stand guard. Why? For the same reason that the cherubim and a flaming sword were placed at the entrance to paradise in Gen. 3:24, i.e. to guard the way to the tree of life and prevent sinners from having access.

It should be evident that a high wall and guards at the gates would not be necessary at the end of the millennium when God is “all in all” and no sinful flesh remains. The city of God is clearly upon earth contemporary with mortal sinful flesh. As guards were posted at the gates of Solomon’s temple to prevent anyone unclean from entering (2 Chr. 23:19), so guards will be posted at the gates of the city of God.

3. Rev. 21:27 states that no one impure or abominable and no liars will be allowed to enter the city. And Rev. 22:14-15 says dogs (sodomites), sorcerers, whoremongers, murderers, idolaters and liars are kept outside the city and will be prevented from entering. Also see Isa. 35:8. 52:1. 60:21. Joel 3:17.

Once again it is evident from this that a mortal sinful population lives contemporary with the city of God upon earth.

4. The nations of the world are represented as being distinct from the city in Rev. 21:24, for they are referred to as walking in the light of it (Isa. 2:1-5), and bringing their treasures to it (Isa. 60).

5. We read in Rev. 22:2 that the leaves of the tree of life in the city will be used for the healing of the nations. If all upon earth were immortal there would be no need for healing. Once again this teaches that the city will co-exist with a mortal world involving infirmity and can only be applied to the millennium, not the post millennial period.

6. It will be noticed that the throne in the midst of the city in Rev. 22:1 is called the throne of God and the Lamb. The fact that the Lamb is still in the midst of the throne indicates it is the time of his millennial reign because after the millennium, he will no longer reign: "Then comes the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God the Father, when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet... And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the son also himself be subject to Him who put all things under him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:23-28).

7. The word "reign" is used in Rev. 22:5 to describe the activities of the saints during this period. This word means to rule as kings. Over whom will they rule if all are immortal? This word "reign" is the same used in connection with the millennium in Rev. 20:4.

8. Rev. 20:7-9 refers to nations revolting against the rule of Christ at the end of the millennium and coming up against the city to attack it. In their ignorance and conceit, they imagine that by a concerted attack on the 12 angels at the 12 gates, they can storm the city. But fire from heaven devours them before they get near the gates.

There is nothing said in this or any other section of Scripture to suggest that the city has just arrived. All the evidence points in the opposite direction. The city and rule of Christ from that centre where his throne is situated, will have been in place for 1,000 years and some of the nations come to resent it and rebel against it.

PLANET EARTH NOT DESTROYED

It should be evident from all this that reference to new heavens and new earth does not mean that the sun, moon, stars and earth are going to be abolished at Christ's return. Planet earth will not be annihilated and a new one created; it will simply be renewed as it was as a result of the flood in Noah's day. Rev. 21:5 says: "Behold, I make all things new," not "new things."

We read in Isa. 45:18 that God did not create the earth in vain but formed it to be inhabited, and we are assured by God in Num. 14:21 that

His ultimate intention is to fill the earth with His glory. Reference in Ps. 72 to Christ's reign on earth continuing for as long as the sun and moon endure also indicates that they will be in existence during the millennium. Also see Ps. 89:36. 113:1-3. Isa. 59:19. Mal. 1:11.

As we have seen, 2 Pet. 3:5-6 explains that "heavens and earth" refers to the "world." In Noah's day it "perished" and passed away. This does not mean that the planet was annihilated, but that the material world of man upon it was destroyed.

Peter goes on to explain that the same thing will happen in the end time, except by fire not water. All the works of man will be burnt up and the present corrupt and polluted materialistic order will pass away with a hiss and a roar, resulting in a renewed heaven (atmosphere) and earth.

Heb. 12:26-27 says heaven and earth will be shaken, resulting in everything that is "made" (the material world of man) being removed. Only the things which cannot be shaken will remain, such as God's kingdom. The city of God, of course, cannot be shaken, because it has foundations made and built by God!

Isa. 26:1 declares: "In that day (i.e. when the high walls of the cities of the nations collapse 25:2, 12. 26:5), shall this song be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city: salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in."

"God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth moves and heaves, and though the mountains are hurled and tumble into the sea; though the seas roar and rage, and the hills are shaken by violence. There is a river whose streams bring joy to the city of God, the holy dwelling of the most High. God is in the midst of the city; she shall not be moved: God shall help her at early dawn" (Ps. 46).

* * * * *

CHAPTER FOUR TWO TEMPLES OR ONE?

We have seen that in order to see the city of God descending to earth, John was carried away by the spirit to a great and high mountain. Attention has also been drawn to the fact that the prophet Ezekiel was also carried away by the spirit to a very high mountain on the south of which he saw a structure that was so large it appeared to be a city (Ezk. 40:2), but it was not a city, it was a temple. Reference is made later in chapters 45 and 48 to a city further south of the temple. It is natural to wonder if the structures seen by Ezekiel and John are the same, and if not, do they refer to different but contemporary structures or do they exist at different times?

The temple and city in Ezekiel's prophecy clearly have certain features in common with the temple-city in Rev. 21 and 22, and they are as follows.

1. A high mountain is a central feature. Ezk. 40:2. Rev. 21:10.
2. An angel does the measuring. Ezk. 40:3-5. Rev. 21:16.
3. They are foursquare. Ezk. 42:15-20, 48:16. Rev. 21:16.
4. A wall is around them. Ezk. 40:5. Rev. 21:12, 17.
5. 12 gates are involved, three on each side, each inscribed with the name of a tribe of Israel. Ezk. 48:31-34. Rev. 21:12.
6. A river of water issues forth. Ezk. 47:1. Rev. 22:1.
7. They have a tree or trees producing fresh fruit on the banks of the river every month for food, and leaves for medicine and healing. Ezk. 47:12. Rev. 22:2.
8. The glory of God dwells in them. Ezk. 43:4-7. 48:35. Rev. 21.
9. God's throne is linked with them. Ezk. 43:7. Rev. 21:3, 5. 22:3.

OBVIOUS DIFFERENCES

Although there are similarities between the structures, there are some obvious differences, making it clear that they are separate and distinct from each other. For example:-

1. The dimensions are enormously different. According to the A.V. Ezk. 42:15-20 says the temple measures 500 reeds square. The L.X.X. gives the measurement as 500 cubits (i.e. the large cubit) which would make the temple 875 ft square. But it is not likely that Ezekiel would think a temple of this size was a city. The measurement is more likely to be in reeds.

A reed is "six great cubits" (Ezk. 41:8), and a "great cubit" is a cubit

plus an handbreadth (Ezk. 40:5). A cubit is 18 inches and an handbreadth is 3 inches making a great cubit 21 inches. Being 6 great cubits, a reed is therefore 10½ feet, which means 500 reeds is 5250 feet. Ezekiel's temple is therefore nearly one mile square. The city referred to in Ezk. 48 which is some miles to the south of the temple, is 4,500 cubits square, which makes it almost 1½ miles square (Ezk. 48:15-16). But the city-temple in Rev. 21 is 375 miles square.

2. Ezekiel's temple and city are both a quadrangle, not a cube. The height of them is not the same as the length and breadth as in the case of the city-temple in Rev. 21.

3. The wall around Ezekiel's temple is one reed (6 great cubits) high (10½ feet) and one reed thick (Ezk. 40:5). The wall around the temple in Rev. 21:17 is 144 cubits i.e. over 200 feet.

4. The city in Rev. 21 is all temple; God's glory fills every part of it and He is worshipped everywhere in it. Such is not the case with the temple in Ezekiel's prophecy. It is not a temple city. It is a separate and distinct structure from the city and contains rooms for guards, rooms for killing animal sacrifices, chambers for washing the carcasses, kitchens for boiling the meat, rooms in which the priests eat their portion of the meat, chambers for storage, dressing rooms and living quarters for the priests. God's glory resides within a separate holy area in this temple, not in every part of it (Ezk 41:1, 43:1-5).

5. The wall around the temple in Rev. 21 is made of jasper and has 12 foundations inscribed with the names of the 12 apostles. Each foundation is a precious stone, and the 12 gates in the wall are made of pearl. These features are not mentioned in relation to Ezekiel's temple or city.

6. Levites guard the gates of the temple in Ezekiel's prophecy (Ezk. 44:10-11). Angels stand guard at the gates of the city (Rev. 21:12). The gates of the city are never shut (Rev. 21:25), but the east gate in Ezekiel's temple is shut during the six work days each week and is only open on Sabbath days and the days of new moon celebrations. On those occasions it will be open for the Prince to enter and will be closed at evening after he has departed (Ezk. 44:1-2. 46:1-2). The Prince clearly does not live there but comes to visit once a week.

7. The city and street in Rev. 21 are made of pure translucent gold, involving astronomical quantities of the most highly refined and polished gold imaginable. Gold will be involved in Ezekiel's temple (Isa. 60) and the treasure referred to in Rev. 21:24 which will be brought by the nations to the city of God will probably be for that temple, but it will be nothing like the quantity involved in the structure of the city of God.

8. The river of water issued forth on the outside of Ezekiel's temple

from under the threshold of the entrance (Ezk. 47:1). In Rev. 22:1 we read that the river proceeds from the throne of God from within the temple and flows down the street inside the city. It would seem that the river flows out of the city down Mt Zion in the direction of Ezekiel's temple.

9. The trees lining the river of life in Ezk 47 are outside the temple, but the tree of life in Rev. 22 is inside the city.

10. The city in Ezekiel's prophecy is in "a profane place" (Ezk. 48:15) i.e. a place for the general or common use of mortals, and is called "Yahweh Shammah" meaning "the Lord is there" (Ezk. 48:35). The city in Rev. 21 is for immortals and is "holy" (v2) and is called "new Jerusalem," which in Hebrew is "chadash Yeruwshalaim" and means "new foundation of peace."

There can be no doubt that entirely different structures are involved. It is generally accepted that Ezekiel's temple and city pertain to the era of the millennium, and all the evidence points to the temple-city in Rev. 21 pertaining to the same era. Whether we like it or not, or can explain it or not, we have to accept that they exist at the same time.

TEMPLES FOR MORTALS AND IMMORTALS

References are made in Scripture to a temple being built at Jerusalem by human hands with human resources at the time of the millennial period (Isa. 60. Zech. 6:15). In view of the fact that it is inconceivable that man could build a 375 mile cubical city, let alone build it in the sky and cause it to descend to earth, the references in Isa. 60 and Zech. 6:15 etc to the temple built by man must be the one referred to in Ezekiel's prophecy.

Every earthly sanctuary built for God by Israel in the past was constructed out of resources gathered from the nations. The same will apply to the sanctuary in Ezekiel's prophecy.

However, the builder and maker of the city Abraham hoped to live in is God, not man, and He has "prepared" it long ago - before the foundation of the world.

It is only by understanding that there will be two levels of people, mortals and immortals living on earth during the millennium that we can appreciate why there will be two temples. The immortals will be Christ and the saints who will rule and reign over the world. The mortals will be the people of the world who survive Armageddon but who don't qualify for eternal life, who are allowed to live out the rest of their natural life. They will marry and reproduce, repopulating the earth with people over whom the saints will reign, teaching and instructing them in the way of God in order to give them the opportunity to qualify for eternal life at the

second resurrection at the end of the millennium.

Jesus taught that the saints will rule over the cities (communities) of the world (Lk. 19:12-19). As a nation today sends ambassadors from its city to other countries as representatives of its government, so the saints will be sent from the city of God as Christ's ambassadors and representatives of his government. The city in Rev. 21 is the house and base of operations of Christ and the saints.

Rev. 21:22 says there is no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

In ancient times, most cities had temples, much in the same way that cities today have cathedrals or church buildings. Ancient Jerusalem certainly had a temple which was situated on Mount Moriah, one of the hills of the city. But the city of God in Rev. 21, in spite of being huge in size, has no temple in it, i.e. there is no separate place or building set apart in the city for worship. Why? "Because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." The Living Bible translation captures the sense of this: "for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are worshipped in it everywhere."

In Biblical times, the temple at Jerusalem represented the house of God where His presence dwelt and where His glory was manifested. People therefore went to the temple to worship Him. But the city of God, the new Jerusalem, is God's house; His and the Lamb's presence and glory fills every part of it, making it unnecessary for a special place or building to be set aside within it for worship for the immortals who live there. It would be quite pointless having a temple inside the city to worship God and the Lamb, when they are already dwelling in the city and are worshipped there. The whole city in every part is the ultimate holy of holies.

The new Jerusalem has no temple in it because it is all temple. City and temple are one and the same. For this reason it is referred to as a temple in the book of Revelation (7:15. 11:19. 14:15, 17. 15:5, 6, 8. 16:1, 17). The apostle John had a number of visions of the saints ultimately being there worshipping God and the Lamb (7:9-17. 14:1-5. 15:2-4. Chapters 21 and 22). It should be evident therefore, that if the city in Rev. 21 is the temple in which the immortal saints live and worship God, the temple and city in Ezekiel's prophecy must be for the mortal population. Various prophecies are made concerning mortals from the nations coming up to a temple at Jerusalem to worship during the millennium, and these prophecies no doubt refer to the temple seen by Ezekiel (Isa. 2:1-5. Ch 60. 66:23-24. Zech. 14:16-19. 8:20-23).

The city in Ezekiel's prophecy will provide accommodation for these

mortal worshippers. Certainly nothing is said about the temple or city in Ezekiel's prophecies being the residence of Christ or the immortal saints. Structures one mile or 1½ miles square would be far too small for the millions that will be involved to even worship there, let alone live there.

Scripture teaches that Mount Zion will be intimately connected with the city of God during the reign of Christ. However, the structure in Ezk. 40 is a temple not a city, and neither is it on the top of Mt Zion but to the south, and the prince only visits it once a week and leaves the same day. Moreover, the city in Ezekiel's prophecy (Yahweh Shammah) is almost 15 miles south of Zion in the area of Hebron (See Ezk. 48). Being so far from Jerusalem, this city is clearly not the city where Christ's throne will be situated and from which he will rule the nations.

The mortality of those who worship in the temple of Ezekiel's prophecy is indicated in various ways. For example, we read in Ezk. 44:9 that all males who have not been physically circumcised as well as circumcised in heart will not be allowed to enter the temple. However, physical circumcision is not a condition of entry into the eternal city of God (Rom. 2:28-29. 3:30. 4:11-12. 1 Cor. 7:18-19. Gal. 5:1-6. 6:15).

Levites of the family of Zadok minister in the temple of Ezekiel's prophecy, offering animal sacrifices upon an altar of burnt offering (Ezk. 43:18-27. 44:15-16). There is no reference to fat, blood and animals being offered in the city. There is no shedding of blood or death of any kind in the eternal city of God.

The priesthood of the house of Zadok in Ezekiel's temple is clearly mortal, for they are not allowed to wear anything that causes sweat, nor enter the service of God drunk (Ezk. 44:18, 21. Compare Lev. 10:1-11). They also have to remove their linen garments before leaving the temple and leave them in sacred rooms (Ezk. 44:17-19).

It would be incongruous to talk in terms of immortals sweating and getting drunk, and having to remove their linen garments when venturing beyond the city. Angels certainly do not. The fact that reference is made to the Levites marrying, having mortal parents, children, and brothers and sisters, clearly indicates they are mortal (Ezk. 44:22, 25). Jesus taught that immortals will not marry (Lk. 20:34-36). It is also stated in Ezk. 44:28 that the Levites have no property. The immortal saints inherit the earth!

According to Ezk. 44:25-27 the Levites will be defiled by contact with a dead person, and will not be able to enter the temple service until a seven day period of ritual cleansing takes place, at the end of which they have to offer a sin offering. But there is no indication in Scripture that the immortal saints will be defiled by contact with a dead body and have to go through ritual cleansing processes before being able to enter the city.

The temple in Ezekiel's prophecy is an inferior replica of the temple in Rev. 21, as was the tabernacle and temple in the days of Moses and Solomon. The major differences are firstly, that Ezekiel's temple is much larger than Solomon's temple, and secondly, the antitypical temple - the heavenly city, will be accessible to the saints at the same time.

Two temples existed at the same time in the past, one on earth and one in heaven; one for mortal worshippers and one for immortals (angels). But, in view of the fact that both mortals and immortals will be living on earth during the transitional phase of the millennium, two temples will be involved during that period. At the end of the millennium when God becomes all in all, and mortality is completely swallowed up in victory, resulting in all upon earth being immortal and having citizenship in the city, the other temple will not be required.

Two thrones also existed at the same time in the past: God's throne in the temple city of heaven and the throne of David on Mount Zion which represented God's throne on earth. (1 Chr. 29:23. 28:5. 2 Chr. 9:8). The same will apply during the millennium.

The throne in heaven is unmistakably the Father's, for Jesus said: "I am set down with my Father in His throne" (Rev. 3:21). However, because Jesus has been invited to sit at the right hand of his Father (Ps. 110:1), the throne is referred to as "the throne of God and the Lamb" (Rev. 22:1-3). But the singular pronouns "his" and "him" in Rev. 22:3-4 which relate to the Father, indicate that the throne is in reality His.

According to Lk. 1:31-33 Jesus will be given the throne of David to reign over the house of Israel, and Matt. 25:31 teaches that he will not sit on this throne until he comes in his glory. The statement made by Jesus in Rev. 3:21 that "To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne," clearly speaks of the two thrones.

When the temple in Ezekiel's prophecy is built on the south of Mount Zion, the throne of David will be in its inner court (Ezk. 43:5-7). Because David's throne in the past represented God's throne on earth, and was referred to as "the throne of the Lord," it is not surprising that it is referred to as God's throne in Ezk. 43:5-7.

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CHAPTER FIVE “HOW CAN THESE THINGS BE?”

In view of the fact that the city had no temple in it, for it was all temple, Ezekiel’s temple will obviously not be inside the city. It is natural therefore to wonder what the arrangement will be.

It may seem impossible and inconceivable on the face of it that Ezekiel’s temple could be in the same land to which John saw the 375 mile square city of God descending, yet not be encompassed by it, or incorporated within it. So it is to be expected that the question will be asked: “How can these things be?”

Sometimes due to lack of revelation and therefore lack of knowledge, it is difficult to understand how certain things in the Word of prophecy will take place. When we are confronted with such difficulties we need to safeguard against explaining away or rejecting obvious truths, simply because we cannot see how they could possibly mean what they say or be fulfilled. Too many expositors have done this in relation to the city of God in order to bring the Word of prophecy within the scope of their own little notions and limited comprehension of things.

The Sadducees made the same mistake. They concluded resurrection was impossible because they could not see how one woman who had been married to 7 husbands could be reconciled with such teaching. In the event of all being raised from the dead, how could she possibly be married to all 7 at the same time?

Jesus swept aside their small minded objection with this challenging reply: “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.” He then went on to explain that those who are resurrected to eternal life do not marry (Luke 20:27-36). It is as simple as that!

The Saducees felt so wise in their preconceptions and so sure that they knew how everything must be, that they instantly rejected anything that did not harmonize with their own ideas and traditions. Their minds were locked into a rigid system of interpretation right down to the last detail of how things should be. Their minds were, according to the saying, “like concrete; all mixed up and permanently set.”

The Sadducees’ mentality today rejects the city of God because it finds such a large city inconceivable and therefore concludes it is impossible. Because it cannot understand how Ezekiel’s temple could be in the land at the same time, and yet not be in the city, it concludes that the city cannot be real or literal. Would the reply of Jesus to such objections be: “You know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God”?

A LITTLE SPECULATION

As far as the city of God is concerned, we only know its shape - a perfect cube. We know very little concerning its design features, and it is dangerous to speculate. But certain statements in Scripture relating to the millennial age, provoke a little speculation, such as the co-existence of two temples. There are also some obvious logical implications of a 375 mile cubical city that invite speculation.

Being a perfect cube, the base of the city would not be curved or arched to follow the contour of the earth. This would mean that if the middle section of the base of the city was sitting upon the land, the outer areas on all four sides would gradually rise higher and higher above the earth as it curves away.

According to Ezekiel's prophecy and other prophecies, the 12 tribes of Israel will live in their land and farm it during the millennial reign of Christ. Ezk. 48 reveals that the land will be divided into parallel strips for the 12 tribes running from east to west, one above or below the other, from the north to the south of the land.

If a 375 mile square floor slab sat down on the land, there would be nowhere for the 12 tribes to live and no grass or soil to farm. Not only that, but in order for the city to sit on the land, the elevated site ("mountain") of Zion would either have to be crushed, or project inside the city. This suggests that the city will not be sitting on the land. However, if the Lamb lives in the city, and reigns from Mount Zion, this would indicate that the city will be connected with the mountain in some way or other.

Ps. 24:3 implies that standing in the holy place (city of God) involves ascending the holy hill of Zion, i.e. Mt Zion will have to be ascended to enter the city. For this reason, reference to dwelling in the tabernacle of God (city) runs parallel with dwelling in the holy hill of Zion in Ps. 15:1. There is also a clear connection between Mt Zion and the city of God in Heb. 12:22. The fact that John was taken to Mount Zion to see the city descend, also indicates a connection between the two.

NOT A NARROW PEAKED MOUNTAIN

Consider also Ps. 48:1-2: "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion..." A connection between the city of God and Mount Zion is quite evident here, and, as pointed out earlier, the

city cannot refer to Yahweh Shammah in Ezk. 48:35, because it is some miles south of Zion. Neither can it refer to the structure that looked like a city in Ezk. 40:2 because it is a temple not a city, and it is situated “on the south” of Mount Zion, not the top.

Reference in Rev. 14:1 to Jesus standing on Mount Zion with the 144,000 indicates that the elevated mount will not be a narrow peaked mountain, but a table mountain. Of particular interest is the fact that Rev. 14:2 refers to the sound of the harps and singing of the redeemed coming “from heaven” above Mount Zion. Do we imagine that this multitude is floating on clouds or suspended in the air? No! The same multitude are presented again in Rev. 15:2 standing on the sea of glass playing harps and singing a song before the throne in the city-temple of God.

It is therefore concluded that the city-temple of God is “hovering” above Mount Zion yet connected to it. Except for the access up the Mount, access to the other gates could be by stairways as in Gen. 28:12 where reference is made to angels ascending and descending upon a stairway between heaven and earth.

If the city is touching or “resting” on Mount Zion, Jesus and the 144,000 in Rev. 14:1 would be standing in it on that level making it as it were “a city on an hill.” “For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it” (Ps. 132:13-14).

No wonder, as we read in Ezk. 43:12, the top of the mountain will be “most holy.” Elsewhere in Scripture the words “most holy” are used to describe the holy of holies in the tabernacle and temple, which of course, represented heaven. Because the city is heaven and is coming to Zion, it is not surprising that the top of the mountain will be most holy!

Being mobile, the city of God is able to hover, and it is believed that a similar occurrence took place when the Lord came down to Sinai. It was not seen by the Israelites due to a blanket of cloud over the top of the mount, but the fiery glory of the Lord was manifested in the cloud and around the mount.

Isa. 4:5-6 says: “The Lord will create over every dwelling place of Mount Zion and over her assemblies, a cloud by day and smoke, and the shining of flaming fire by night: for over all the glory shall be a canopy...” Again in Isa. 31:5 we read that the Lord will hover over Jerusalem as a bird hovers around its nest.

In view of the fact that the city is paradise, it is not surprising that the land with which it connects also becomes a paradise. Ezk. 36:35 says it becomes “like the garden of Eden.”

NO MORE SEA

Since the wicked are described in Isa. 57:20 as being “like the troubled sea,” the reference in Rev. 21:1 to there being “no more sea” is taken by some to mean there will be no more wicked. Such, however will not be the case during the millennium as we have seen in Rev. 21:8 and 22:15. Also Isa. 65:20. 66:24. Others, on the basis of “waters” representing nations in Rev. 17:15 have concluded that there will be no more nations. This is also incorrect. See Rev. 20:8. Ps. 72. Isa. 60. Zech. 14:16-.

Neither can it mean the abolition of the oceans of the world because Ps. 72:8 declares that Christ will “have dominion from sea to sea,” and Zech. 14:8 reveals that the Mediterranean sea will still exist.

As has been pointed out, Mount Zion will be elevated by the great earthquake which occurs at the second coming of Christ, and the fact that John is taken to it to see the city descending, indicates the earthquake has occurred at the time of the vision.

Reference in Rev. 21:1 to there being no more sea could also have something to do with the effect of the earthquake in preparation for the city. If the mountain and city are literal, why not the sea?

According to Rev. 22:1-2 a river of water of life proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, down the midst of the street where the tree of life stands. This sounds like the tree of life is near the throne, and according to Rev. 2:7 the tree is in the midst of paradise, i.e. in the middle of the city. If the throne is near the tree, it would also be in the middle of the city. And if the throne sits over or upon Mt Zion, the middle of the city would be in that area.

Now, if you take a 375 mile square and put a throne in the middle, it is 187½ miles from that point to the outside of the square on all sides. This would mean that the city would extend from Zion 187½ miles northwards, southwards, eastwards and westwards, as seen on the cover.

In view of the fact that it is only about 35 miles from Jerusalem to the Mediterranean sea as the crow flies, means the western side of the city would extend 152½ miles out over the sea - if the sea is still in that area!

It is inconceivable that the city wall would extend over the sea, and therefore very tempting to conclude that there will be no sea where the city extends to the west, and that this is what John Refers to in Rev. 21:1.

From the vantage point of the high mountain at Jerusalem, John would be able to look as far as the Mediterranean coast and see that there was no more sea, but there is no reference to him doing so.

It is not unreasonable to consider that the same earthquake that

heaves Mt Zion up to greater heights and levels the hill country around it, could also heave up the floor of the Mediterranean sea causing the sea to recede. It is evident from Hag. 2:6 that a huge shake-up is going to occur in the sea as well as the land, affecting all sea life (Ezk. 38:20). It is going to be an earthquake of mammoth proportions, unprecedented in world history, causing mountains and islands to disappear and new land to appear: (Rev. 6:12-17. 16:18-21). Reference is made in Isa. 11:15 to the tongue of the Egyptian sea (Gulf of Suez) being destroyed. In the past, God dried up the sea (Isa. 51:10) and He will do it again on a larger scale (Isa. 50:2. Zech. 10:11). In view of the dramatic physical changes that will affect the contours and topography of the earth, it will certainly be a “new earth” in more ways than one!

In view of the fact that the living water that flows out of Jerusalem shall flow into both the Mediterranean and Dead sea (Zech. 14:8), it is evident that the Mediterranean will not recede as far as the Atlantic ocean and disappear altogether. It will only need to recede as far as the city extends which is around 152½ miles. Over 1,000 miles of the sea would remain, stretching westwards to the Straits of Gibraltar and the Atlantic ocean. One thing is certain: The oceans of the world will not disappear at the return of Christ, otherwise he would not be able to have dominion from sea to sea.

AN AIR OF MYSTERY

There is a mystery deeply embedded in Jerusalem and the surrounding land that defies any mere human explanation. This area of the globe was chosen from the foundation of the world to be the footstool of God - the resting place of the city of God, and the end time convulsion of the land will prepare it for that incredible visitation (Psa. 132:13-14).

Men love to build cities and incorporate modern architecture and create special lighting effects to attract attention and impress. They love to make their buildings eye catching and dazzling with coloured glass, glittering chandeliers, chrome, brass, polished wood, fountains and streams. Some of the modern hotels in the large cities have lavish accommodation, superb suites with delicate decor. They are beautifully prepared and finished, fit for a king. They are prepared like a bride with their beautiful tapestry, carpet, curtains, ornaments and furnishings.

Imagine what the city of God will be like. It certainly will not be inferior to the cities built by man, causing an anti-climax or “ho-hum” attitude.

Ps. 50:2 says: “Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence”

“The perfection of beauty” is the divine description and assessment of the future Zion when the Lord comes.

When the queen of Sheba saw Solomon’s house and kingdom and its adornment and administration, there was “no more spirit in her.” She was flabbergasted and speechless, and so shall all be who see the house of the greater than Solomon and its adornment.

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CHAPTER SIX MANY MANSIONS

From the very beginning, God ordained marriage not only as a means of procreation but as a type of the ultimate union between Christ and the Church. For example, we read this in Eph. 5:31-32: “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall be joined (cleave) to his wife and they shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

Verse 23 of the same chapter says: “For the husband is head of the wife even as Christ is head of the church husbands love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word, that he might present her to himself as a glorious church, not having spots or wrinkles (creases).”

Commitment to Christ is like an engagement. In 2 Cor. 11:2 Paul refers to converts to Christ being “espoused” to one husband, presented to him as a chaste virgin.

Again in Rom. 7:4 Paul says: “Therefore my brethren, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, that you should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.”

Christ is referred to in a number of Scriptures as the bridegroom (Matt. 9:15. 25:1-. Jn. 3:29) and the church as the bride or wife (Jn. 3:29. Eph. 5:31-32. Rev. 19:7. 21:9).

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER

The uniting of Christ and the church at the second coming is also referred to in Rev. 19:7 as a “marriage” and verse 9 says a “marriage supper” will be involved.

Jesus referred to this in some of his parables. For example, Matt. 22:1-2: “And Jesus answered and spake to them again by parables and said, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king who made a marriage for his son.”

In this parable, the “certain king” refers to Father God; the “son” refers to Jesus, and the “marriage” refers to the union between Christ and the church which occurs at the second coming.

Weddings involve great joy and celebration, feasting and drinking, and the marriage between Christ and his church will certainly be no

exception.

Jesus continues his parable in Matt. 22:4 by saying that those invited to the marriage were told by the king that: “I have prepared my feast; my oxen and my fatlings are killed and all things are ready: come to the marriage.”

Reference is made to this “feast” in Lk. 14:15: “And when one of those who sat at table with Jesus heard these things (i.e. his teaching concerning resurrection), he said to Jesus, Blessed is he who shall be at the feast in the kingdom of God.” Jesus replied to this by giving the parable about “a certain man who made a great feast and invited many.” There are references to the feasting in both the Old and New Testament:

Matt. 8:11: “Many shall come from the east and west and sit (recline) at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”

Matt. 26:29: “But I say unto you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine again until that day when I drink it new with you in my father’s kingdom.”

Isa. 25:6: “And in this mountain (Zion) shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people (i.e. the saints called out of all nations) a feast (banquet) of rich and delicious food; a feast of well aged and matured wine - of food rich and juicy, a feast of old wine well refined.”

As we have seen (Heb. 12:22 etc) Mt Zion is connected with the city of God. This is where the marriage supper takes place! This is why John was taken to the city to see the bride of Christ (Rev. 21:9-10) after being told about the marriage supper (Rev. 19:7-9).

Lk. 12:37: “Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he comes shall find awake and watching: Verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself and make them sit at table and will come forth to serve them.”

JESUS BASED HIS TEACHING ON JEWISH MARRIAGE

Although customs and ceremonies associated with weddings differ from country to country down throughout the ages, weddings are highlights - “bright spots” of human experience; solemn yet joyful occasions. But from a Christian point of view, the Jewish custom is the most interesting and significant because the parables and teaching in Scripture on marriage between Christ and the church are based on it! The Jewish custom or procedure was a type of events to come concerning the uniting of Christ and his church at his second coming.

In relation to this, a book entitled: “An Israeli Love Story” by Zola

Levitt is interesting. One particular chapter relates to a Jewish Rabbi telling his daughter Rebecca about the procedure. The following is a summary:-

1. The bridegroom makes a covenant and pays a price, i.e. a marriage dowry.

2. He leaves the bride for some time and goes back to his father's house. He goes to build a bridal chamber for her - a place where they can come together in marriage for the first time. Before he leaves he tells her: "I go to prepare a place for you."

3. The bridegroom always returns. "If I go away I will come again."

4. Before he returns, he has to finish preparing the bridal chamber and have it approved by his father.

5. The bridal chamber had to be stocked with provisions. It also had to be beautiful and attractive, not rough and ready.

6. While the bride waited, being "bought with a price," she set herself apart and was committed (consecrated) to her future husband. She did not flirt or keep company with other men. She wore a veil in public to avoid attracting other men and remained chaste and virtuous. In preparing herself for the coming of the bridegroom, she ensured that her wedding dress had no spots or wrinkles (creases).

She did not know the day or the hour of the bridegroom's coming, but used the time to prepare herself and "make herself ready." She would not stray or wander away from her home at night as she would not want to risk being caught away when the bridegroom came to get her. The tradition was that he came at night to catch her by surprise.

7. The Jewish brides were "stolen" out of their houses; they were "whisked off" - "caught away" into the night. When close to her house, the groom's party would "shout," and when the bride heard it she knew she was as good as taken.

8. The bride was taken to the bridal chamber - the "father's house" where the marriage took place and where the relationship was consummated. Much feasting and drinking and joy took place.

With these thoughts in mind, we turn to the words of Jesus in Jn. 14:2-3: "In my father's house are many mansions (abodes, residences, rooms); if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also."

In Scripture, the "house" of God can relate to the church which is a spiritual temple with many abiding places (1 Tim. 3:15. Eph. 2:19-22. 1 Pet. 2:5). "House" and "temple" are used synonymously in Scripture.

However, there are also many Scriptures which relate the house of God to the literal physical temple of God in heaven and on earth (Ps. 23:6. 84:10. 92:12-15. Isa. 6:4. Matt. 21:13. Lk. 2:49. Jn. 2:16,17. Rev. 21:3 “tabernacle of God.”)

I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU

When Jesus said “I go to prepare a place for you,” he was referring to his ascension to heaven. And the fact that he said this after stating there were many rooms in his father’s house, suggests he had the literal house, i.e. the city-temple of God in heaven in mind.

There could certainly be, as already pointed out, many rooms in a 375 mile cubical city, and God’s purpose is “that my house be filled” (Lk. 14:23). It will require the millennial reign of Christ to fulfil this.

The word “prepare” means to provide and make ready. It is the same word used in relation to preparing lodging in Philemon 22, which the New English Bible renders: “Have a room ready for me.” The apostle Paul was requesting Philemon to prepare somewhere for him to stay with the necessary furnishings and facilities.

The “place prepared by God” in Rev. 12:6 likewise refers to a place set aside by God for His people to stay in safety and be fed when hunted by the enemy.

Christ’s reference to going to heaven to prepare a place in God’s house for his prospective bride, the church, is in harmony with the Jewish tradition which involves the bridegroom going back to his father’s house to prepare a chamber for his bride.

In like manner, God’s house or city, has been built for a long time (Heb. 11:10, 16. Matt. 25:34), but Jesus has gone there to prepare a place for his bride. Hence, when the city finally descends to earth, it is “prepared as a bride for her husband” (Rev. 21:2).

This is quite a concept! As the bride of Christ is preparing herself and making herself ready (Rev. 19:7), the bridegroom is preparing and adorning the house where he will live with her.

In view of the fact that the preparation work performed by the Jewish bridegroom involved furnishing the chamber, making it beautiful and attractive for his bride, one wonders what Christ’s preparation work involves. Isa. 6:1 refers to the Lord sitting on his throne, high and exalted, and his train filling the temple. What does this mean? A “train” is the flowing skirt of a robe. Does it weave its way through the rooms of the

temple like a tapestry, symbolic of the covering of Christ by which entrance to the city is gained? If so, the robe would no doubt be beautiful, consistent with the beauty of the city.

Ruth said to Boaz: “Spread your skirt over me” (Ruth 3:9). That is, “Cover me,” as a gesture of marriage. The “skirt” filling the temple could signify this.

Coming back to Jn. 14:3, Jesus said that if he goes away he will come again and receive the church to himself, so that where he is, she may be also.

1 Thes. 4:16-17 elaborates on this: “The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout (by the “groom’s party”) with a voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together (“stolen” - “whisked away”) with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

The same word “meet” is used in Matt. 25:1 and 6: “At midnight a cry was made, Behold, the bridegroom is coming, go out to meet him.”

The Greek word translated “meet” is not the normal word that is used elsewhere. It is “apanteesis” and only occurs four times in the New Testament; twice in Matt. 25 as already pointed out, once in 1 Thes. 4:17 and once in Act. 28:15.

Apanteesis has a special significance in Greek: it was used to describe the official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary. When someone important was coming to a city, it was the custom of the officials to go out and meet him and accompany him into their city. Much in the same way that a mayor and his party would go to the airport to meet the queen of England or president of the U.S.A, and accompany them to the city.

This sense of the word is particularly evident in Act. 28:15 which refers to Christians at Rome going as far as Appii Forum, a market town about 40 miles from the city of Rome, to “meet” Paul who was coming to stay with them.

When they met Paul, he did not turn around and take them all back with him from where he came. No! He continued on his journey to Rome accompanied by the welcoming party.

In like manner, when Jesus descends from heaven, and the church is caught up into the air to “meet” him, he will not turn around and take her back from where he came. No! He will continue his descent to the earth which is his destination, accompanied by the church.

CAUGHT UP INTO THE AIR

Some, who have an aversion to things supernatural and feel more comfortable keeping Scripture as much as possible within the confines of normal human experience, get technical with the word “air” in order to avoid the conclusion that the saints will literally be caught up into the air to meet Christ at his second coming. They maintain that as the air is above the earth, being caught up into it simply signifies that the saints will be elevated in rank as rulers over those on earth when Jesus returns.

When Scripture refers to dust being thrown into the air (Act. 22:23); shadow boxers beating the air (1 Cor. 9:26); people speaking into the air (1 Cor. 14:9) etc, the reference is clearly to the atmosphere.

In relation to being “caught up” into the air: the Greek word is “harpazo” and means to be seized, snatched, plucked, pulled, taken physically by force. For example the words “take by force” in Jn. 6:15 in relation to the Jews planning to take Jesus by force to make him a king, are “harpazo.” The same applies to the reference in Act. 23:10 to soldiers taking Paul by force. The word is also translated “pulling” in Jude v 23 in relation to “pulling out of the fire.”

Of particular interest is Act. 8:39 which refers to Philip being “caught away” by the Spirit of God to another place some miles away. The words “caught away” are also “harpazo” in the Greek. Philip was physically transported through the air by the power of God.

The prophet Ezekiel was also lifted up by the Spirit into the air and taken from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezk. 8:3. 3:11-15).

Elijah was also caught up into the air - literally and physically (1 Kng. 18:12. 2 Kng. 2:11).

The Spirit of God drew Jesus up into the air (Act. 1:9), and angels constantly ascend and descend through the air (Gen. 28:12. Dan. 9:21).

There is nothing new or peculiar about the power of God transporting people through the air! This is what is going to happen to the saints at Christ’s return!

ANGELS GATHER UP THE SAINTS

It should be evident that if the saints all around the world are to be with Christ when he returns to Zion, they will have to get over there somehow or other. Surely no one thinks they will have to get there under their own steam, by road, rail, sea or aeroplane. No! “He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his

chosen ones from the four winds, from one end of heaven (the horizon) to the other” (Matt. 24:31).

Paul also refers to this gathering of the chosen ones in 2 Thes. 2:1: “Now we beseech you brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him.” Here, he is referring back to the reference in his first letter in relation to being caught up into the air to meet the Lord when he descends from heaven.

In one of his parables, Jesus referred to it in terms of being carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom (Lk. 16:22). Many shall come from the east and the west and shall recline with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of God (Matt. 8:11). This is what is meant by Abraham’s bosom.

“Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence; a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be raging round about him Gather my saints together to me; those who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice” (Christ’s sacrifice!) (Psa. 50:1-5).

In that day each saint will say: “He (God) sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters (persecution v4, 43); He delivered me from my strong enemy (the Beast), and from those who hated me: for they were too strong for me..... He brought me into a large place” (city of God) (Ps. 18:16-19).

Scripture seems to teach that Jesus wants his church to accompany or escort him in glory when he descends to earth. For this reason the saints will be caught away to meet him in the air.

Consider the following: “And the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with him” (Zech. 14:5). “Behold, the Lord God comes with 10,000 saints” (Jude v14). 1 Thes. 3:13 refers to “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all the saints.” And we are informed in Col. 3:4 that when Christ shall appear, we shall also appear with him in glory.

In the event of the saints being caught up into the air to meet Jesus as he descends, it is natural to wonder if they will remain out in the open in the atmosphere, or be taken into the city and descend to earth in it with Jesus. As already pointed out, in order to see the bride of Christ, John was taken to see the city of God descending to the promised land where the great and high mountain of Zion is situated (Rev. 21:9-10). The bride will obviously be in the city with Christ and his angels as it descends to earth!

“ENTER THOU INTO THY CHAMBERS”

In the light of this, consider the following passage in Isa. 26:19-21: “Thy dead shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise (at

the resurrection: 1 Thes. 4:16-17). Awake and sing ye who dwell in the dust: for thy dew (millions of droplets which descend through the air) is as the dew of herbs (i.e. vital for the life of the earth). Come, my people (those resurrected at Christ's return), enter thou into thy chambers, and shut the doors behind you: hide thyself (disappear into thin air!) as it were for a little moment, until the wrath is past (the great shaking of the planet). For behold, the Lord comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity”

When God arises to shake terribly the whole earth, causing mountains and cities all around the world to tumble, islands to disappear, new land to be heaved up causing the sea to recede, it would not be fitting or appropriate for the saints to be upon the earth at that time. That judgement is for sinners, not saints! The saints will therefore be airlifted from the planet into their bridal chambers in the house prepared for them by their bridegroom.

Reference to them entering their chambers and shutting the doors behind them is reminiscent of Noah and the ark. Rooms were in the ark (Gen. 6:14) and Noah and his family were told to enter and the door was closed behind them (Gen. 7:1, 16). When the judgement of God was poured forth and the water rose, those in the house were lifted above it and were not affected or hurt by it.

Lot also and his daughters were taken by angels out of the city of Sodom and went up into the air - up a mountain to avoid the divine judgement that fell upon the city.

“As it was in the days of Noah as it was in the days of Lot, so shall it be in the days of the Son of man” in more ways than one! (Lk.17:24-30).

While the earth is shaken, the cities of the nations fall, and the heavens and earth are on fire melting and dissolving the material works of man with fervent heat, the saints will be safe and secure in the city of God.

Their song in that day will be: “We have a strong city” (Isa. 26:1). Also see Ps. 46. 48. 87. 122. Isa. 33:20.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

JERUSALEM ABOVE - THE MOTHER OF US ALL

It is a sobering thought to consider that the present houses we live in, no matter how expensive and comfortable they might be are not our abiding places. They do not have foundations that will be able to withstand the shaking that is to come. Being temporary abiding places, it is pointless being over preoccupied with them.

The true children of Abraham only see them as tents, and look for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. “We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” “For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come” (2 Cor. 4:18. Heb. 13:14).

From all accounts the city of God is a glorious city, full of the glory of God, and glorious things are spoken of it, as we read in Ps. 87:3: “Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God.” The following verses go on to say that those who live in the city were born there.

What does this mean? Well, Jesus taught that in order to see the kingdom of God a person has to be “born again,” or born from above, which involves being born of water and spirit (Jn. 3:1-8).

This involves two major experiences: Firstly, a conversion in which the carnal mind is transformed into a spiritual mind. This involves receiving and believing the Spirit-inspired Word of God which proclaims the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. This leads to repentance and confession of sin, baptism, and allowing our lives to be led by the spirit instead of the flesh.

The second major experience involves the conversion of our mortal body into an immortal body. This will be the ultimate of being born of the spirit. Jesus is the first to experience this and is referred to as “the first born from the dead,” “the first begotten from the dead” (Col. 1:18. Rev. 1:5). He is, as we read in 1 Cor. 15:20, “the firstfruits of them that slept.”

The firstfruit on a tree is an earnest or specimen of the harvest that is to follow. Jesus is an example of the immortality that has been promised to the church. He is an immortal body, not a disembodied immortal, and he will “change our lowly body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the power which enables him to subdue all things to himself” (Plp. 3:21).

The saints have been predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ, and for that reason he is the firstborn (Rom. 8:29). When he

appears and is manifested to the world in glory, we shall be like him, born of the fullness of the spirit, and radiant in immortality (1 Jn. 3:2).

Being born of the Spirit to immortality is a quick operation: “in a moment, in the blinking of an eye” (1 Cor. 15:52). No long drawn-out labour and labour pains or travail will be involved in this birth. It is sudden and instantaneous.

It is natural to wonder where and when this will take place. It certainly takes place at the second coming of Christ, and probably in the city of God. Remember what Ps. 87 says concerning the city: “this one, and that one, were born in her.”

It is clear from 1 Thes. 4:17 that all the saints will be caught up “together” in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and it is equally clear from Rom. 8:17 that they will all be glorified (made immortal) “together”.

Jesus himself was glorified in the same city, which, as we have seen is heaven. For this reason we read in Heb. 6:20 that he has entered there as “the forerunner.”

When the whole church is immortalized and glorified together, it will truly be a nation born in a day! And if this birth occurs in the city of God, a new dimension is given to the reference in Gal. 4:26 to Jerusalem above being “the mother of us all.” And the reference in Plp. 3:20 to our citizenship being in heaven could be given a much more literal application than what some have been prepared to give it, due to believing that the saints never go to heaven. The same applies to the Christian desire to “be clothed upon with our house which comes from heaven,” “a building of God not made with hands ... that mortality might be swallowed up by life” (2 Cor. 5:1-4).

VERY DRAMATIC MANIFESTATION

The concept of the city of God can certainly fire up the imagination. According to many prophecies, prior to the return of Christ, the sun, moon and stars will stop shining and the earth will be plunged into gross darkness. Nations will be utterly distressed and in a state of total quandary. Men’s hearts will be failing them for fear.

It is around about this time that Christ returns and various Scriptures refer to the brightness of it. 2 Thes. 2:8 refers to “the brightness of his coming.” Matt. 24:27 says: “as the lightning comes out of the east and shines as far as the west, so also shall the coming of the son of man be.” It is put like this in Mal. 4:2: “the sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his beams.” This is interesting in view of the fact that the city

shines like the sun (Rev. 21:23). The darkness into which the earth is plunged will accentuate the brightness of the second coming. The world's darkest hour will give birth to its greatest and brightest light!

Imagine how awesome and frightening it would be for the survivors on the earth, locked in absolute darkness, seeing a 375 mile square cubical city radiant with the glory of God like the sun, shining and sparkling like a diamond in the sky, descending into earth's atmosphere. No wonder fear and trembling will grip those who have assembled against Jerusalem when they see this (Ps. 48:1-6). At first, it might appear in the distance as a speck of light in the sky, like a star, and get bigger and brighter as it draws closer to the earth, enabling the people ultimately to see that it is a massive cubical city, dwarfing into absolute insignificance any space city man has ever made.

If, as suggested earlier, the city of God hovered above earth during creation week and gave light until the sun and moon appeared on the 4th day, it would have the same effect at the second coming at which time a new creation is created - the new heavens and earth.

THE CHALLENGE

The challenge to each of us is of course: will we be in the city? Many will come and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets, but many will also be denied access causing weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Ps. 24:3 puts the pertinent question to us: "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, whose soul does not pay homage to worthless things. Such are the people who seek Thy face O God of Jacob."

"Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He who walks uprightly and does what is right, and speaks the truth from his heart; He who does not backbite with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbour nor casts discredit on his neighbour..." (Psa. 15).

"He who overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful (cowards) and unbelievers, the abominable, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers (includes druggists), idolaters and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev. 21:7-8).

Under no circumstances shall anyone corrupt, who does detestable things and lies, enter the city (Rev. 21:27).

"Blessed are those who wash their robes and keep God's

commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14).

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