

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

HARRY BOWERS, EDITOR

7844 GRIMBSY CIRCLE, HARRISBURG, N.C. 28075

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A TALE OF TWO CITIES

"It was the best of times, and the worst of times. It was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was an epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair..." so wrote Charles Dickens in *The Tale of Two Cities* in 1859. Perhaps these words could describe the times when the Apostle Paul wrote of two cities in Galatians 4:25, 26: "Now Hagar is Mount Sinai of Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem...but the Jerusalem above is free..." There were two cities: "the present Jerusalem" (the physical city) and "the Jerusalem above" (the spiritual city). The entire New Testament has much to say about these two cities.

The first mention of the city of Jerusalem in Scripture is Joshua 10:1 where Adonizedek is said to be the king of Jerusalem, however Genesis 14:18 identifies Melchizedek as "king of Salem" and Psalm 76:2 says God's "tabernacle is in Salem, and His dwelling place is in Zion." This means Salem was identified with Jerusalem. II Samuel 5:6 and 7 is the record of David capturing Jerusalem, (also called "Zion"), from the Jebusites and called it "the city of David." The Psalms praise the city as "the dwelling place of God" and many times refer to it as "the city of God." Jerusalem was given these names, not by the people who inherited the land, but directly by God Himself: Deuteronomy 12:5,11 states: "You shall seek the Lord at the place which the Lord your God shall choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come...then it shall come about that the place in which the Lord your God shall choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I commanded you..." This was a veiled prophecy of the temple that would be located in the city of Jerusalem. The temple and consequently the city of Jerusalem became to the Israelites the dwelling place of God. They never believed that God physically dwelled in the temple, as the pagans around believed their gods inhabited their temples, but rather that the temple represented the earthly place where man came closest to God. Thus it became "the Holy city" and is still thought of in those terms by many Christians today. There are many American Christians that want to visit the holy shrines and see the land of "God's chosen people." These Christians come away very impressed and filled with religious fervor. It is common today for ministers and religious people to lead tours to the "Holy Land". *The Israel Ministry of Tourism* describes Jerusalem as "a city of overwhelming emotions, a city that promises a religious and spiritual experience, excitement and pleasure, interesting tours and entertaining adventures."

Dr. Gore Gold, the president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and Israel's ambassador to the U.S. 1997-1999 in his book *The Fight for Jerusalem* lists these three main schools of thought in Christianity currently held with respect to Jerusalem: (1) The supersessionist view of Jerusalem that questions whether Jerusalem retained any special theological significance after the coming of Christ. Israel as the focus of God's concern has been replaced by the church that has become "The Israel after the Spirit." (2) The incarnational approach that views Jerusalem, the site of the great events of the New Testament, as a unique holy city. Just as the Jews cherish Jerusalem because they associate God's presence with the city's Temple Mount, incarnationalists

view the city as sacred because it was once the home of the divine presence through the body of Jesus. (3) A third approach is the restorationist view, which is inspired by the restoration of the Jewish people to the Holy City in modern times. Frequently called Christian Zionism and looks upon this as a divine sign of the soon coming of Christ.

The record of the history of Jerusalem from David throughout the prophets pictures Jerusalem as racial, national, local and provisional until all it represented would be fulfilled in Christ. It was organized around both civil law and sacred ritual based upon what we call "the Old Covenant." Yet in practice the Jerusalem of the Old Testament became everything but "the city of God." Typical of how the prophets described the city is seen in the words of Isaiah as he pronounces judgment upon the city: "How the faithful city has become a harlot; she who was full of justice! Righteousness once lodged in her, but now murders. Your silver has become dross, your drink diluted with water. Your rulers are rebels, and companions of thieves; everyone loves a bribe, and chases after rewards. They do not defend the orphan, nor does the widow's plea come before them" (Isaiah 1:21-24). The prophet Micah echoes Isaiah's sentiments in these words: "Now hear this, heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and twist everything that is straight, who build Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with violent injustice...therefore, on account of you Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the temple will become high places of a forest" (Micah 3:9-12). Jeremiah was perhaps the most caustic in his prophecies of doom. For example he said to King Zedekiah: "This city will be given over to the hand of the king of Babylon and he will capture it... and they will burn it with fire..." (Jer.38:3, 18).

God's fulfillment of these prophecies is stated in these words: "He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans...and He gave them all into his hand; and all the articles of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord he brought them all to Babylon. Then they burned the house of God, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all the fortified buildings with fire and destroyed its valuable articles. And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon...to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept Sabbath until seventy years were complete" (II Chronicles 36:17-19). Seventy years later Ezra and Nehemiah, with a remnant of people, returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple, the city and the walls.

Four hundred years later, one greater than the prophets lamented: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it. Behold, your house is left to you desolate, and I say unto you, you shall not see me until the time comes when you will say 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'" (Luke 13:34-35). This was fulfilled in 70 A.D. when the city was destroyed again by the Romans. The corruption that caused its destruction was so bad the apostle John said that spiritually it is

called Sodom and Egypt (Rev. 11:8). Early in his ministry Jesus said that the time would come when Jerusalem would no longer be the center of worship (John 4:21).

The best commentary and explanation of the two cities, the present Jerusalem and the Jerusalem above, as stated in Galatians 4:24-31 is found in the symbolism of the book of Revelation. The present city (the physical city in John's day) is described in Revelation chapters 17 and 18. The city above (the spiritual city in all ages) is described in Revelation chapters 21 and 22. We will now deal with the symbolism of these two cities.

The identity of the physical city is seen in comparing Scripture with Scripture (the Bible is its own best interpreter). Revelation 18 describes the destruction of a city typically called "the great harlot" and "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and the abominations of the earth" (17:1, 5). The city is called "the great city" seven times (16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21). In chapter 11:8 the great city which "mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also the Lord was crucified." The Lord was crucified in Jerusalem, therefore, the great city is Jerusalem. The city is also called "the great harlot" (17:1; 19:2). The metaphor of harlotry is used exclusively in the Old Testament for a city or nation that had abandoned the covenant and turned to false gods. It is always used to describe Israel (Isaiah 1:21; Ezekiel 16, seven times and Ezekiel 23, sixteen times). Two exceptions: Nineveh and Tyre.

Ezekiel's description of Israel as a harlot was crude and probably offended many, but was an exact description of how offensive they were to God. John H. Pratt in *The Thought of Evangelical Leaders* quotes a 19th century preacher, H. Foster as saying: "I once went through Ezekiel 16, but dare not do it again." Thomas Myers, in *Calvin's Commentaries* stated: "The translators of John Calvin's commentary on Ezekiel simply deleted several passages with this note: 'The reformer dwells so minutely on the language of the prophet, that the refined taste of modern days will not bear a literal translation of some clauses.'" However, neither Ezekiel nor John had any trouble of describing Israel and chiefly Jerusalem with the words "harlot" and "harlotry". This, then, is a description of what Paul called "the present Jerusalem (that) is in slavery with her children" (Gal. 4:25).

Hebrews 12:22 states: "You have come to Mt. Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem..." Revelation 21:2, 3, gives this commentary on the Jerusalem above: "And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a voice from the throne, saying 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people and God Himself shall be among them.'" In verses 9-22:6 John is giving the details of these verses 2 and 3. Nowhere in this chapter does it say this is heaven, a city in the sky. Note verse 9: "and one of the seven angels come and spoke to me saying, 'Come here and I shall show you the bride, the wife of the lamb.'" The angel did not say "I will show you heaven." Rather, "I will show you the *bride*, the wife of the Lamb." No one can doubt or dispute the fact that the bride of the Lamb is the church (Eph. 5:27, 32). Note verse 10: "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." He does not say we go "up" to dwell with God, rather He comes "down" to dwell with us. This is the community of the redeemed in fellowship with God. "Coming down from heaven" says it is always a work of God's

sovereign grace. The symbolism of the rest of the chapter describes the church as it should be. It reflects the glory of God in a world of darkness (ver. 11). Christ, the lamb, the true light drives away the darkness of ignorance, misery, guilt and moral pollution. In and through him the glory of God becomes manifest in the church. The holy city needs no natural or artificial light (ver. 23). The word is God's light (Psalm 119:105) which is the message of the church and has no need to use gimmicks to reach people for Christ. It has walls great and high (ver. 12-20). Walls represent salvation (Isa. 26:1, 60:18). The wall also divides between the holy and profane (Ezek. 42:20). The church is a holy people, separated from the world. The twelve foundations are the teaching of the Apostles which they received from Christ, the corner stone (Eph. 2:20). This means the foundation of the church is Christ (I Cor. 3:11). The twelve gates (ver. 13) are for entrance. Jesus first entered heaven itself (Heb. 9:12, 13) and made it possible for us to enter into the very presence of God, the prerogative of the church (Heb. 9:19, 20). Contrary to modern thought, there is only one street in the city (ver. 21, 22:2) and only one way to God and this is only through Christ Jesus (John 14:6). There is no temple in the city (ver. 22). No temple is needed for the fellowship of believers with God is direct and immediate. "The Lord God and the Lamb are its temple." Both God and Christ dwell in the believer through the Spirit (John 14:23), therefore, they become the sanctuary of the church. Nations will walk in the light of the church and kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it (ver. 24). This is an astonishing statement. Yet Isaiah 60, which is a prophesy of "the city of the Lord" (ver. 14) or the church, states "the nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising" (ver. 3) and the wealth of the nations will come to you" (ver. 6). Further "the nation and the kingdom which will not serve you will perish" (ver. 12). This is a "prolepsis" (that is God declares something to be true when it has not yet happened). We do not yet see this happening (as the Hebrew writer said) "but we do not yet see all things subjected to him, but we see him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely Jesus" (Heb. 2:8,9), and what he has done and who he is. This aspect of the church will someday be fulfilled.

Turning back to Paul's description of the two cities, in Galatians 4:28-29 we read: "And you, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise, but as that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit." The foremost enemy and persecutor of the church in New Testament times was not Rome but apostate Judaism. The persecution by Rome did not start until about 64 AD when Nero became Emperor. The book of Acts records the persecutions and harassments Paul faced on his missionary journeys were all caused by unbelieving Jews, especially the elite from Jerusalem which followed him from province to province, stirring up riots and causing turmoil in the cities where the gospel was preached. He states it this way "Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes; three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep...in Damascus the ethnarch (a Jew) under Aretas the king was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands" (II cor. 11:24,25, 33). Paul's trouble in Thessalonica and Berea is stated in these words: "The Jews, becoming jealous and taking some wicked men from the market, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar...but when the Jews in Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea, they came there agitating" (Acts 17:5, 13).