

An exposition of Revelation 21

3. The bride, the Lamb's wife

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Revelation 21 speaks in vivid detail of a city called "holy Jerusalem". Comparison with earlier Scripture shows that this is a representation of the saints ruling in the millennial age.

IN PART 2 we saw that John's vision of the new heaven and new earth related to the millennial age, when the covenants of promise made with the fathers will be fulfilled. When John saw the new heaven and new earth, what he actually saw was "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). This holy city is the city for which Abraham looked, "whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). It is the "Jerusalem which is above . . . which is the mother of us all" (Gal. 4:26), relating to the new covenant in Christ Jesus. In the second part of chapter 21 (vv. 9-27) John sees a vision of this holy city descending out of heaven, and he describes the city to us in vivid detail.

"One of the seven angels which had the seven vials"

The first thing to note is that John was shown this city by an angel: "And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God" (vv. 9,10). It is reasonable to conclude from this that this particular section of the vision coincides with the conclusion of the vials and the outpouring of the wrath of God, described for us in Revelation 16. This, of course, takes us to the beginning of the Millennium.

"The bride, the Lamb's wife"

Notice what this angel said to John: "Come hither, I will shew thee *the bride, the Lamb's wife*". We read about the Lamb's wife elsewhere in Revelation: "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and

his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is *the righteousness of saints*" (19:7,8). We are told here that the Lamb's wife was arrayed in fine linen, representative of "the righteousness of saints". Clearly the Lamb's wife represents the saints collectively.

This is an image with which we are familiar from elsewhere in the Scriptures, which present the relationship between Christ and the ecclesia as that of husband and wife. For illustration, here are two examples:

- "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27)
- "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2).

"That great city the holy Jerusalem"

The angel said to John that he would show him the Lamb's wife. But what John actually saw was a city: "And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal" (Rev. 21:10,11).

When we looked at this heavenly city in Part 1, we established a link with Isaiah 65, where the prophet spoke about God's intention to "create new heavens and a new earth". We saw that Isaiah explained that the "new heavens" related to "Jerusalem", and the "new earth" related to "her people": "For, behold, I create *new heavens and a new earth*: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. 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*" (vv. 17,18).

We also examined the symbolic meaning of heavens and earth, and saw that things in heaven represent *rulership*. This helps us to understand what the holy city that John saw really represents. It symbolises *the rulership of the millennial age*, to be administered by Christ and the saints. The following table will help.

"New heavens"	"Jerusalem"	Government in the Kingdom of God, that is, Christ and the saints
"New earth"	"Her people"	Subjects of the Kingdom of God, that is, the people of Israel regathered

Although this future world government will be of heavenly origin, it will nevertheless be based upon the literal city of Jerusalem, on the earth. Jerusalem is "the city of the great King" (Mt. 5:35). The prophet Isaiah tells us that "out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (2:3). When this heavenly administration is in power in the earth, at the return of Christ, it will be formulated on the basis of *the new covenant*. [Part 2](#) showed that the new covenant is intertwined with the heavenly Jerusalem. Galatians 4 demonstrates this link very clearly.

Galatians 4

This chapter contains that wonderful allegory where Hagar is said to stand for "Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children", and Sarah is said to stand for "Jerusalem which is above . . . the mother of us all" (vv. 25,26). Hagar thus represents Israel under the Law covenant, whose administration was centred in the literal city of Jerusalem. Sarah represents the future dispensation when Israel will be brought into the bonds of the new covenant, the promises to the fathers will be fulfilled, and Jerusalem will finally become "the city of the great King" (Mt. 5:35), and "they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD" (Jer. 3:17).

In this allegory Paul makes use of two Old Testament scriptures, both of which are highly significant in terms of our studies in Revelation 21:

- 1 In Galatians 4:27 he quotes from Isaiah 54:1;
 - 2 In Galatians 4:26 he alludes to Psalm 87:5.
- The remainder of this study will focus on Isaiah 54. Part 4 will consider Psalm 87.

Isaiah 54

"But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband" (Gal. 4:26,27). Paul is quoting here from Isaiah 54:1: "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD". On the authority of Paul, then, we can say that Isaiah 54 is all about "Jerusalem which is above", that is, the city that John sees in Revelation 21.

Isaiah presents this city to us as a city full of joy and rejoicing. Why so? Because, although Jerusalem was barren, she now has children, lots of them: "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited" (vv. 2,3). The allusion is, of course, to Sarah, who was barren, yet had a child in her old age. Through that child of promise she became the mother of a multitude as numerous as the stars of heaven. Who are these children? Paul says Jerusalem is "the mother of us all". And in fact Isaiah mentions Jerusalem's children in verse 13: "And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children".

"All thy children shall be taught of the LORD". Jesus himself refers to this phrase in John 6, where he tells us quite plainly who these children are: "No man can come to me, except the Father Which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, *And they shall be all taught of God*. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (vv. 44,45). So these children, born to Zion, are those whom the Father draws, those who have heard, and learned of the Father, and come to Jesus. In other words, we are Zion's children! Jerusalem is our mother!

The covenant in Isaiah 54

Remember how in our previous studies we saw a strong association between the heavenly Jerusalem that John saw and the covenants of promise. It should come as no surprise, therefore, to find that in Isaiah 54 there are a number of references to the covenants:

- 1 "For thou shalt *spread abroad* on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall possess the nations, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited" (v. 3, RV). This is a reference back to Genesis 28 and God's repetition of the promise to Jacob: "And, behold, the LORD . . . said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and *thou shalt spread abroad* to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (vv. 13,14).
- 2 "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall *the covenant of My peace* be removed, saith the LORD That hath mercy on thee" (v. 10).
- 3 "In righteousness shalt thou be *established*" (v. 14). The Hebrew word that Isaiah uses here, translated "established", is very much a covenant word. Remember those two pillars that Solomon erected at the entrance to the temple, Jachin and Boaz. The name 'Jachin' is derived from this word and means 'He will *establish*'. We can see how this word is clearly associated with the covenants from 2 Samuel 7. In the context of the covenant made with David, the word occurs no less than *six times*:
- "I will establish his kingdom" (v. 12)
 - "I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever" (v. 13)
 - "thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee" (v. 16)
 - "thy throne shall be established for ever" (v. 16)
 - "Thou hast confirmed to Thyself Thy people Israel to be a people unto Thee for ever" (v. 24)
 - "let the house of Thy servant David be established before Thee" (v. 26).

So, as we might expect, Isaiah 54, a prophecy about "Jerusalem which is above", is rooted in the language of the covenants.

The city in Isaiah 54

We might think that we have strayed a long way from Revelation 21, but we have not at all, because in Isaiah 54:11,12 we have a description of the same heavenly Jerusalem that John saw: "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy *stones* with fair colours, and lay thy *foundations* with *sapphires*. And I will make thy windows of *agates*, and thy *gates* of *carbuncles*, and all thy borders of *pleasant stones*".

Here we have the foundations, the gates, and the precious stones, which is precisely what John saw, as recorded in Revelation 21:

- "twelve gates" (v. 12)
- "the wall of the city had twelve foundations" (v. 14)
- "the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones" (v. 19).

Precious stones

John goes into detail regarding the different types of precious stones that made up the foundations of the wall of the city. It is not our intention to look in any depth at the different stones. But taken collectively, what do these stones, and the "pleasant stones" of Isaiah 54, represent?

They are the redeemed, those who make up the heavenly city. Malachi makes reference to them in his prophecy: "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day *when I make up My jewels*; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" (3:16,17).

God's jewels will be made up of those who fear Him, and who think upon His Name. Their names will be written in the book of life. May it be in God's mercy that we will be numbered amongst His jewels.

[\(To be concluded\)](#)

Precious stones owe their beauty to the light. In the absence of light they are dark: let the light come and they glow in all the dazzling and many-coloured refractions that give them their preciousness. The counterpart will be recognised in the relation of Christ as the sun to the precious stones, his brethren. Apart from him, they can do nothing and are nothing . . . At the same time, there must be fitness in themselves to reflect the light. The brightest sunshine falling on brick produces no beauty.

Robert Roberts, *Thirteen Lectures on the Apocalypse*, p. 216