

# OUR DESTINATION – NEW JERUSALEM

In Galatians 4, Paul discusses two covenants, the covenant of law and that of grace, and shows his surprise that some of them preferred to be under the law as slaves rather than enjoying the freedom of being God's children and his heirs by grace. Unbelieving Jerusalem is in slavery with her children, but the Jerusalem that is above is the mother of the righteous. Paul doesn't go into detail, but he suggests that there is a city in heaven which is the future abode of the righteous (Gal 4:26).

The author of Hebrews gives us more detail. He tells Christians that they have come to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. In this city there are innumerable angels, the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven (born-again believers), God, the judge of all, the spirits of the righteous made perfect (the righteous dead), Jesus, and his sprinkled blood which brings about forgiveness and atonement (Heb 12:22).

Abraham was looking forward to this city that has (permanent) foundations and whose designer and builder is God (Heb 11:10). The faithful desire a better homeland, that is, a heavenly one (Heb 11:16). The author says that believers will receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28). They have no lasting city here in this world, but we seek the city that is to come (Heb 13:14), the New Jerusalem.

John gives us a long description of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2 – 22:5). The description is very symbolic because the city is heavenly, that is, it is in a different time/space dimension to planet Earth. So our immediate destination after the resurrection is not just "heaven", but the holy city that comes down out of heaven. Those who come out victorious from the Great Tribulation will dwell in God's city, the New Jerusalem (Rev 3:12). Jesus said he would write the name of the city on them (as a sign that they are permanent residents).

As seen in Hebrews, the New Jerusalem community consists of God, Jesus, angels, and the redeemed, saints of both the Old and NT eras. The redeemed are there as children of God in their resurrection bodies. There is no more death, crying, or pain. The saints are glorified; they are now immortal and will reign with Christ forever and ever.

The redeemed are a kingdom of priests and will reign over the earth during the millennium. How life will be in the heavenly realm is a mystery but various clues are scattered throughout the NT. In the parable of the ten coins, a nobleman (the Messiah) went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then returned. He rewarded one of his faithful servants, saying he would have authority over ten cities, and another received authority over five cities (Luke 19:11-19). In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus tells the righteous that they will inherit the kingdom that has been prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Matt 25:34). We are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us. The creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God (Rom 8:17-19). To the Corinthian Christians, Paul says, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And, "Do you not know that we are to judge angels?" (Cor 6:2-3).

In John's Gospel, Jesus speaks three times about "where I am" (John 12:26, 14:3, 17:24). "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, my Father will honor." 'Where I am' is present tense. Jesus was talking about a place where he was currently present, but not the place where he was talking to his disciples. Jesus spoke about being in the Father and the Father being in him. He said he can only do what he sees the Father doing. As God, Jesus is omnipresent and he was always conscious of his presence with the Father. His servants would one day experience this also. They will one day be where he is, in the Father's presence. Christians must follow Jesus now in the world, but one day they will be with him in that heavenly realm.

Jesus said he was going away to prepare a place for his disciples (John 14:3) and he would come again to take them to be with him, "so that where I am, there you may be also." He has gone to prepare a place for us. Many assume that he is talking about heaven, but he did not mention heaven, he only said that his Father's house had many rooms. This event will occur when Jesus returns, at the resurrection and

rapture of the saints. When Jesus returns to earth, he will *bring* with him his people who have died (1 Thess 4:14). Their bodies will be resurrected and reunited with their souls, and the living saints will be caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air and so they will be with the Lord forever. There is no mention here or in John 14 of the believers being taken off to heaven; rather the Lord will descend with his saints (Zech 14:5b, 1 Thess 3:13). The New Jerusalem is a city that has been prepared in heaven for us, but which descends from heaven to Earth. This is our future home.

In John 17, Jesus prays to the Father for his community. He wants them to be united with him and the Father so that *the world* may believe that the Father sent him. He has given the saints the glory that the Father gave him and he wants them to be where he is so that they will see the glory that the Father gave him before the foundation of the world. Where will this happen? Where will the believers see Jesus' glory and share in Jesus' glory and be one with him and the Father, so that the world will come to know that the Father loves him and his disciples? Not here on Earth before Jesus returns and it won't happen in heaven, because *the world* is not in heaven and the Bible doesn't say that we are going to heaven. It will happen in the New Jerusalem immediately after the resurrection, in the city that he is preparing for us, the city where the spirits of the righteous made perfect already are (Heb 12:22), the city that Abraham was looking forward to and where he is right now. When we all rule the world with the Messiah, living in a glorious city in the sky, the world will know that it is Jesus and the saints who have been glorified with resurrection bodies and that the kingdom of the world is now in their hands.

The New Jerusalem is the holy city that comes down from heaven. It is called the heavenly city because its origin is in heaven and it is heavenly in nature, since it is in a different dimension to the created order. It is the New Jerusalem that we should think of as our future destination, while the Earth will be our continuing place of ministry. God the Son is the Creator of the physical universe and also its Sustainer. He is the Savior of the world and also its Heir. In other words, the world and the whole physical universe are the Son's project, with the Father in the background as sovereign over all. John says the dwelling place of God will be with man, not that the dwelling place of man will be with God. God will leave his traditional dwelling place in heaven and join us as we rule the Earth. The Platonists and their disciples the Amillenarians don't like this idea, because they regard the world as corrupted and not a fit place for God to be associated with, but God plans to show the world and the principalities and powers in the heavenly realm that by his manifold wisdom he has won the battle against evil by saving the Church, a truly representative community from all of humanity, and given them the privilege of ruling the world during a new peaceful and righteous era, the Messianic reign.

Details of the saints future existence are not explained, whether it be their life in the Holy City or their ministry on planet Earth. We know that they will have supernatural resurrection bodies so that they can commute from one dimension to the other and that there will no longer be death, pain, or tears. God will be their God and they will be his children. The city will be glorious and have no need of the sun or moon, it will be completely self-sufficient. The nations on Earth will walk by its light, they will submit to the Messiah's rule, and bring their treasures and their glory to it.