

## JERUSALEM FROM ABOVE

<sup>9</sup>Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." <sup>10</sup>And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup>having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. <sup>12</sup>Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: <sup>13</sup>three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.

<sup>14</sup>Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup>And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. <sup>16</sup>The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. <sup>17</sup>Then he measured its wall: one hundred *and* forty-four cubits, *according* to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. <sup>18</sup>The construction of its wall was *of* jasper; and the city *was* pure gold, like clear glass. <sup>19</sup>The foundations of the wall of the city *were* adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation *was* jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, <sup>20</sup>the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. <sup>21</sup>The twelve gates *were* twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city *was* pure gold, like transparent glass.

<sup>22</sup>But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. <sup>23</sup>The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light. <sup>24</sup>And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and

honor into it. <sup>25</sup> Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). <sup>26</sup> And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. <sup>27</sup> But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

OK. As we prepare to discuss the Bride who is discussed in this passage, we must remember the words from earlier in the chapter. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men." As we have often discussed in our study of this Book, this is one of the major themes of the entire New Testament. After the destruction and passing away of the old order, something new has come. This new thing, as we will see in this passage is the fact that God's heavenly temple, his tabernacle, is now with man kind. This is no minor event, this is in fact everything that Christ has won in his life, death, resurrection, and now His ascension where he sits at the right hand of the Father, judging and ruling the nations. But, and this is critical to understand, we have His presence actually with us. His tabernacle, which is the dwelling place of the Holy of Holies is now firmly with us.

Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 28 in what is known as the Great Commission, "...and I am with you always, even to the end of the age." He said this before ascending to His Father, but there is a sense, and we will discuss that today where He is actually present with His church.

Our text today begins with the words, "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife."

These angels who poured out the bowls of God's wrath on the harlot city, are now showing us the contrast, and that contrast is the Bride. She is the wife of the lamb.

Now we are told that John is carried away in the spirit to a great and a high mountain. The harlot, as you may recall was witnessed in a wilderness, so obviously this contrast is something we are meant to pay attention to.

The Bible tells us about Eden in the very early chapters of Genesis. We know from that description, that Eden was located on a mountain. And as we look in the next chapter of Revelation this glorious city is also located on a mountain. From it flows the river of life, which feeds nourishes, and heals the nations. Now from this mountain top, John sees the holy city, Jerusalem, and she is descending out of heaven from God.

This text has so often caused a lot of confusion amongst people who read this book. There are some who insist that the only proper way to read this passage is to read it in a strict literal sense. Now I understand their reasoning for doing this, there are many who have over the centuries of the Church who have attempted to allegorize the Scripture to the point that it loses meaning. But one of the important things we have to learn about the Bible is the key to Biblical interpretation is to interpret the Scripture with the Scripture. This is important throughout the Bible, but I think even more important here in the Book of Revelation. This is a book that is absolutely chock full of imagery that is borrowed or taken from other parts of the Bible, when we ignore or set aside these images in favor of any interpretive approach, be it strict literalism, or be it something else, we are not letting, the Bible tell us its own story.

People in the past, especially recently, and by that I mean in the last 40 or 50 years have read all kinds of weird things into this descending city. Some have seen the city as a floating space station, others have actually seen this city as a "floating city." I have a book at home, that speaks about in these last days that Jerusalem will actually hover above its current location. Of course in doing this they have to ignore Biblical passages which

speaking about the City that God's people are looking for. In Hebrews 11, the famed faith chapter we read about Abraham, where it says,

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he dwelt 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; <sup>10</sup> for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

The promises to Abraham, and the promises to all of the Old Testament saints were about this city. The land of promise, the land of Israel, was a mere foretaste of the glory that awaited those who were faithful.

Please notice, Abraham was called by God, and he went out not knowing where he was going, but by faith, which means trust and obedience in the Word of God, he dwelled in a foreign land, with Isaac and Jacob who it tells us were also heirs of that same promise. But the land of Israel, the land they went to was merely a foretaste of the actual promise. They would be recipients of a true and a glorious city. A City whose builder and maker was God.

Here in Revelation 21 we get a look at that city. It descends from heaven and in it is the fulfillment of all the promises to God's people. It is the New Jerusalem. In this we must understand that this city was unlike any city that had ever come before or since. It is not limited by geography, it is not limited by nationality, in fact it encompasses all the faithful from that time forward to today and more.

I had asked us to read the last chapters of Ezekiel a few weeks ago. In Ezekiel 43 the first five verses we read these words about this new and glorious temple:

Afterward he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east. <sup>2</sup> And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory. <sup>3</sup> *It* was like the appearance of the vision which I saw—like the vision which I saw when I came to destroy the city. The visions *were* like the vision which I saw by the River Chebar; and I fell on my face. <sup>4</sup> And the glory of the LORD came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east. <sup>5</sup> The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple.

Ezekiel was looking ahead to a day when the glory of the Lord would fill this temple. In Revelation 21:10-11 we see this actually accomplished.

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup> having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

This new Jerusalem which descends from heaven has within her midst the very glory of God. One of the things that is often debated about this text was when exactly did the glory of the Lord inhabit this new temple. I believe this took place at the ascension of our Lord which is described in Luke 24:50-51:

And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup> Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, <sup>53</sup> and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.

This was confirmed at Pentecost in Acts 2 when Christ sent the Holy Spirit to comfort and encourage His Church. This event was momentous in many ways. It was not only a source of comfort to the Church in Jerusalem, it was also a sign that the old temple, the physical temples that had stood in Jerusalem was no longer the dwelling place of the Lord.

Yes the ceremonies and rituals continued in that temple for a little while longer. But the presence of the Lord had abandoned the physical temple in Matthew 23. Early in the book of Ezekiel we read Ezekiel's account of the glory of the Lord departing from the temple, This is a lengthy passage, but let me summarize it for you.

In the early part of this passage we see what looks like a large sapphire stone, which is a throne, one like unto a man is told to go amongst the cherubim. This is a portrait of the risen Lord in the throne of God.

Verse 4 tells us:

Then the glory of JEHOVAH went up from the cherub, *and paused* over the threshold of the temple; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of JEHOVAH'S glory. <sup>5</sup> And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard *even* in the outer court, like the voice of Almighty God when He speaks.

The cherubim in these verses are described, and it is quite amazing how much they sound like the living creatures which are in the throne room of God early in the Book of Revelation. My encouragement to you is to read all of Ezekiel 10, 11, and 12 this week. The imagery is difficult, but when we read this imagery as a portrait of the events of the first advent of Christ it becomes clearer.

In verse 18 we read:

Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. <sup>19</sup> And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight. When they went out, the wheels *were* beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the JEHOVAH'S house, and the glory of the God of Israel *was* above them.

In the next chapter in verse 22 we read:

So the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was high above them. <sup>23</sup> And the glory of the JEHOVAH went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain, which *is* on the east side of the city.

These events are prophetically fulfilled in the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew. In Matthew 23 Jesus speaks his final judgment on the city of Jerusalem when after speaking a series of 7 woes on the scribes and Pharisees in the very temple He then proceed to tells them:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! <sup>38</sup> See! Your house is left to you desolate; <sup>39</sup> for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the JEHOVAH!’ ”

After speaking these judgments in the temple, he departs the temple and leaves through the eastern gate, and gives the Olivet discourse on the mountain east of the city. You see the glory of Jehovah was standing in that very temple, and because of their unbelief and their idolatry, He departed and left the temple.

“See, Your house is left to you desolate.”

And after leaving the desolate place he went to the Mount of Olives and further clarified with His disciples the judgment that He was speaking of. We have spoken much of Matthew 24 and the events of that prophecy in this series, but what needs to be made clear here, is that desolation, that abandonment of the physical temple was for a very important purpose. The New Spiritual Temple was coming. Ezekiel makes this clear in the latter chapters of his book. What Ezekiel saw as coming John now see’s as having arrived.

An interesting footnote to these prophesied events is a detail from the Roman historian Josephus. In AD 66, coincidentally on the day of Pentecost, 36 years from the day when the Spirit was poured out upon the Church, as the priests in temple, which was

still standing, were going about their duties, there was heard and I quote, "a violent commotion and din followed by a voice as of a host, saying, "We are departing hence."

The temple in Jerusalem which had been the seat of the Most Holy was not no more holy than any other building.

Ernst Martin said of this: "...From Pentecost A.D. 66, no thinking person among the Christians who respected these obvious miraculous signs associated with the temple, could believe that the structure was any longer a holy sanctuary of God."

Josephus stated that "many came to believe that God had turned away even from His sanctuary."

Of course, this abandonment of the physical temple is not where this passage stops. The old temple is not the subject of this passage, but the new temple. The New Jerusalem. The City that descends from heaven is described as,

"having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal."

What is this light? Not surprisingly, this should not be too difficult for us to figure out. The Greek word here is the word *foster* which literally means star or light bearer. In the Greek Septuagint this is the same word used for the, sun moon and stars which were made on the 4<sup>th</sup> day.

In Philippians 2:14-15 immediately after speaking of the glory of the resurrected Christ, Paul says to Christians:

Do all things without complaining and disputing, <sup>15</sup> that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

Remember in Philippians 2:5 we are told that our example was Christ Jesus who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, <sup>7</sup> but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God also has highly

exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In the Gospel of John our Lord is described as the light of the World. He is described as the true light which gives light to all men.

Now here in Revelation the glorious city is illumined by that light. Our text today goes on from here with a more detailed portrait of this city. Next week, we are going to look at these details. Amongst the description here we see the walls, the foundations, and they are described using precious jewels.

But what I want us to really get a picture of today is the very basics of this city. It's origin is not earthly. It comes from above. We are told in Ephesians 2, a passage that we should all be familiar with:

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Christ has raised His church up into heavenly places. But we still have work to do here. We are from above, but we are told to shine as lights in dark places. We do that, not through worldly means. We do that by simple faithfulness and obedience to our Lord, and as we do these things, the City of God which comes from above begins to consume those areas which were once enveloped in darkness.

We are going to be singing a song in a few minutes that is about this glorious city. The imagery in this song is about the ancient city of Jerusalem, but what it is really showing us is a portrait of New Jerusalem the city from above. In the last verse we are singing today we will sing the following:

In Zion we have seen performed  
A work that was foretold  
In pledge that God for time to come  
His City will uphold.

The Glorious City from above will grow, it will flourish, and nothing formed in earth or under the earth will ever be able to stand against the gains of that city. She is after all the Lamb's wife, and she is a reflection of His glory.

Let us pray!

Communion Meditation:

Revelation 19:6-9

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! <sup>7</sup> Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." <sup>8</sup> And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

<sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'"

Blessed are they who have been invited to this meal. But what is the cry of those who have been so invited.

"Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! <sup>7</sup> Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."

Christ now reigns. He has overcome, sin, hell, and the grave, and we who have been called to dine with him receive all the benefits of the victory He has won. Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come!

