

THE NEW JERUSALEM -- THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

Some people think receiving salvation is the culmination of their Christian search, but in reality, this should be the starting point of a lifelong pilgrimage of spiritual growth, leading to perfection in holiness, and consecration to the Lord.

The reading below gives three titles to states of spiritual perfection that are essentially synonymous.

1. **Mount Zion**, which symbolises our personal knowing the abiding presence of God.
2. **Heavenly Jerusalem**, which is also called 'New Jerusalem.' This is another title for the perfected Church, which consists of an invisible membership of those perfected in holiness by God's refining hand.
3. **Just men made perfect**. Another name for those who have been perfected by God's refining hand is 'the bride of Christ.'

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect [the bride of Christ], to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.” Heb 12:22-24.

Some people think that the bride of Christ is the whole Church resurrected at the end of the age, but in the parables of weddings, and this reading from Revelation, there are the Lord and His bride, accompanied by those who are called or invited to the marriage supper. **“Blessed are those who are called [or invited] to the marriage supper of the Lamb!”** Rev 19:9. The marriage supper of the Lamb will take place after we are resurrected to our heavenly existence.

The bride of Christ consists of people who, down through the ages, have stepped on the path of the cross, and daily laid their carnal natures on the altar of the cross to be put to death by God's refining workmanship. This involves a lifelong process that gradually eliminates carnality, and replaces it with the nature of the Lord.

Our Pilgrimage to Mount Zion

In the next reading our pathway to spiritual perfection in knowing the abiding presence of God, is referred to as our pilgrimage to Zion.

“Blessed is the man whose strength is in You whose heart is set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca [weeping or trouble], they make it a spring; the rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion.” Ps 84:5-

There are a number of illustrations in the Scriptures, that have presented a symbolic representation of those who have accepted God's refinement, and reached the status of the bride of Christ.

The One Hundred and Forty-Four Thousand on Mount Zion

“Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads... These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being first-fruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.” Rev 14:1-5.

standing on Mount Zion: Mount Zion represents the presence of God amongst His people, and that by their standing on Mount Zion, shows that the one hundred and forty-four thousand had reached fulfillment in their spiritual pilgrimage to know the abiding presence of God.

one hundred and forty-four thousand: This is not a literal number. In biblical numerology, twelve symbolises divine government, and one hundred and forty-four, the complete reign of God, in this case, in those who have reached the status of the bride of Christ. This means that God can express His reign in and through those standing on Mount Zion.

having His Father's name written on their foreheads: the name of God is the seal of God's ownership. They had been brought to perfection in obedience, and presented to Jesus Christ, who stands with them on Mount Zion. The seal on their foreheads means that their carnal minds have been put to death and replaced with the mind of Christ.

they are virgins: they are not physical but spiritual virgins, meaning that they were entirely consecrated to God. In the scriptures the opposite to virginity is harlotry, like engaging with sinful nations in idolatry, as portrayed in this reading. **“You also committed harlotry with the Egyptians, your very fleshly neighbours, and increased your acts of harlotry to provoke Me to anger.”** Ezek 16:26.

who follow the Lamb wherever He goes: they are totally obedient to Jesus, and accept His reign over whatever He wants them to do, and wherever He wants them to minister.

redeemed from among men, being first-fruits to God and to the Lamb: Spiritual growth in holiness and perfection is an ongoing process occurring here on earth, and in our heavenly existence. The one hundred and forty-four thousand have been perfected by God here on earth, and so they are called first-fruits of God's work.

without fault before the throne of God: They are not without sin, but they are perfect in their obedience to the pathway allotted to them, allowing God to continue refining them and reshaping their lives.

THE SONS OF ZADOK – Representing the Bride of Christ

At the time of the following prophecy, Israel had been defeated by Assyria, and scattered amongst surrounding countries, ceasing to exist as a nation. Although addressed to Israel, this prophecy has a more general application to those with ministries in the modern Church. It addresses two types of ministers – the Levites (descendants from the Levitical Priesthood) who went astray

from God's will, and the **"Levites, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from Me."** God now passes His judgment on those with ministries who did not keep His charge.

"And the Levites who went far from Me, when Israel went astray, who strayed away from Me after their idols, they shall bear their iniquity. Yet they shall be ministers in My sanctuary, as gatekeepers of the house and ministers of the house... And they shall not come near Me to minister to Me as priest, nor come near any of My holy things, nor into the Most Holy Place...Nevertheless I will make them keep charge of the temple, for all its work, and for all that has to be done in it."

This passage is relevant to those with ministries in the modern Church, who have neglected presenting the truth of the necessity of our old or carnal man being united with Jesus in His death - - to accept suffering refinement that we might be **"heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."** Rom 8:17. Without the death of the 'old man,' there is no union with Christ in His death, or resurrection in Him to live a new life in union with Him. Nevertheless, these ministers are not entirely condemned. They are still trusted with keeping the charge of the activities of the Church.

"But the priests, the Levites, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from Me, they shall come near Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer to Me the fat and the blood," says the Lord God. **"They shall enter My sanctuary, and they shall come near My table to minister to Me, and they shall keep My charge."** Ezek 44:10-16.

The second group are called 'the sons of Zadok,' the Levitical priests entrusted by David to bring the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem. These 'Sons of Zadok' were faithful to God when others of Israel had gone astray. They represent those in the church, through history and today, who are faithful to God in yielding themselves to God's refining hand. Consequently, they are fulfilled in knowing the abiding presence of God, and being His bond servants.

"...and they shall stand before Me to offer to Me the fat and the blood:" The fat in the body is a reserve of energy for future need. The blood symbolises the totality of their lives -- **"for the life of the flesh is in the blood"** Lev 17:11. To offer to God the fat and the blood, is to relinquish the totality of our provision, and the fulfillment of our lives into God's hands.

"...they shall come near My table to minister to Me:" The table represents knowing God personally, enabling them to minister in complete harmony with his will.

"And it shall be, whenever they enter the gates of the inner court, that they shall put on linen garments; no wool shall come upon them while they minister within the gates of the inner court or within the house. They shall have linen turbans on their heads and linen trousers on their bodies; they shall not clothe themselves with anything that causes sweat." Ezek 44:17-18. Sweat symbolises self-effort, or the works of the flesh, which are offensive to God because they hinder God's true works.

THE OVERCOMERS -- WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO THE CHURCHES

In Chapters 2&3 in Revelation, Jesus addressed the seven Churches in Asia, revealing to them their spiritual state. At the end of each of Christ's address to the Churches, there is an instruction from the Holy Spirit, addressed to Overcomers: **"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."**

Whereas Christ's address is likened to types of Churches down through history, the Spirit's address to the Overcomers presents stages of spiritual growth of Christians.

Ephesus

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. 'To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.'" Rev 2:7.

To partake of the tree of life is to receive the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to be a recipient of everlasting eternal life.

Smyrna

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." Rev 2:11.

The second death is eternal damnation in hell.

"Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." Rev 20:15.

Pergamos

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it." Rev 2:17.

These overcomer blessings refer to entering into a closer relationship with the Lord. The manna, often referred to as the 'bread from heaven,' provided sustenance to the children of Israel in the wilderness. On the earth, Jesus was sustained by the life of the Father, and the words spoken to Him.

"I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me." John 6:48-51 & 56-57.

The hidden manna refers to the invisible abiding presence of Christ's life in us. The white stone was presented to winning athletes, and as a token of innocence in a trial. Overall, this blessing to overcomers refers to entering into a personal relationship with the Lord.

Thyatira

"And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations — He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's

vessels' —as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" Rev 2:26-29.

He who overcomes will be given authority to use the power of the name of Jesus, to cast down the strongholds of the nations, or the opposition of those controlled by Satan. The morning star is a title given to Jesus. He will instigate and empower their ministries according to their legitimacy.

Sardis

"He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" Rev 3:5-6.

A person may lose his salvation if he rebels against the lord and denies his deity. He who overcomes, his salvation will be kept intact. He will be given white garments, which show that his works are not tainted by the flesh, but being done with the Lord's initiation and empowering.

Philadelphia

"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" Rev 3:12-13.

"I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God": a pillar is a structural item of support. This overcomer will be a person to whom people turn to for support and strengthening.

"He shall go out no more": he will not revert back to a lower stage of growth.

"I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God:" New Jerusalem is another title for the bride of Christ. He will have reached the status of the bride of Christ, and God will set His seal of ownership on him.

Laodicea

"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" Rev 3:21-22.

"I will grant to sit with Me on My throne": he will be invested with power to reign with Jesus, as He initiates and empowers his ministry.

THE NEW OR HEAVENLY JERUSALEM

Whereas the previous readings presented the individual attributes of the bride, this reading reveals an overall view of the bride, couched in the symbology of a city.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that in the culmination of the pilgrimage, we are united with **“the spirits of just men made perfect [the bride of Christ].”**

Jerusalem symbolises the true Church, and heavenly Jerusalem the perfected Church, manifested here on earth and in our heavenly existence. In the next reading, heavenly Jerusalem, also called ‘New Jerusalem,’ is referred to as ‘the bride, the Lamb’s wife’ – also known as ‘the bride of Christ.’

“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. 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, having the glory of God.” Rev 21:9-11.

The bride of Christ, or perfected Church, descends from heaven, clothed with the glory of God. We see from this that the individual members of the bride of Christ have been refined and perfected in holiness by God’s workmanship.

Whereas other Scriptures present figurative pictures representing aspects of a single bride of Christ, the following reading uses an image of a city to reveal the general attributes of the bride of Christ as a whole. John was taken to a great high mountain to view the city, showing that it was a spiritual image that could not be viewed from an earthly perspective.

“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: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west”. Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb...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. Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits...The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones... 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. Rev 21: 12-18.

Parts of the city-image illustrate some of the attributes of the perfected Church.

Twelve gates: The names of the twelve tribes of Israel were inscribed on the gates. This reminds us that God chose Israel to present His covenant, His commandments, and to host Jesus Christ, the founder of our Church. Because of our debt to Israel as a foundation, they are pictured as the gateway into Christianity.

Its dimensions. In this vision, the dimension of the city precluded it from being an actual physical city, being 560 kilometres in length, width, and height.

It was in the shape of a cube: The Holy of Holies was also cubical, the cube symbolising God’s ultimate control in every direction.

The foundations: the foundation stones of the city are inscribed with the twelve names of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. The twelve apostles were called ‘the apostles of the witness,’ having

been given the responsibility of recording the teachings of Jesus, which are the foundation of the Christian Church.

Each individual gate was of one pearl: Pearls are formed when an irritant, such as a grain of sand becomes trapped in an oyster's mantle. To protect itself, the oyster secretes successive layers of aragonite and conchiolin, which eventually form into a pearl. This is a pattern of how a person is refined through sufferings directed by God, which burn out soulish self-centred attributes of our natures until a Christ-like nature is formed. A person cannot enter into a bride status without going through this refining process.

The street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass: Gold represents the presence of God's Spirit, and the transparent glass, its purity and freedom from contamination.

The description of the city is extended further in Chapter 22, where water, symbolising the Holy Spirit, flows out of the city from the throne of God and the Lamb bringing spiritual healing and life to the unsaved nations of the world. We see from this reading that members of the bride, or New Jerusalem, will have an important role in bringing new spiritual life and truth from the Holy Spirit to those who need salvation.

“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.”
Rev 22:1-5.

NEW JERUSALEM OR BRIDE OF CHRIST ON THE EARTH TODAY

There has been a manifestation of New Jerusalem or perfected Church in every generation throughout the ages, consisting of individual members who have reached the status of the bride of Christ. This means that there is a present-day existence of New Jerusalem, the perfected Church, or bride of Christ.

This perfected Church has no earthly organisation, its members are not recognised by other Church members, for spiritually, their lives are hidden away in Christ in God. **“For you [their carnal man] died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God...”** Col 3:3-4. In Christ's eyes, these hidden-away ones have a super important role in being used by Him in the restoration of His Church, and His kingdom reign on earth.