

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.***

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

#03-0994

New Jerusalem #4.

January 30, 2009

Living Stones

When considering New Jerusalem, most would begin with Revelation 21-22 and see it as all future. However, I believe that it is best to start with the epistles, especially Paul's writings, for here we see that New Jerusalem is actually about a people, and it is not all in the future. After all, in Hebrews (most likely written by Paul), we are told that we have come to the celestial (heavenly) Jerusalem; not that we will come to it as some future event but that we have to come it now (Hebrews 12:22 CV). Paul wrote in his Ephesians epistle that God has seated us together among the celestials, in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6 CV). Again, this is a present reality and not all future. Further, he wrote to the Galatians that the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother (Galatians 4:26). This is a topic unto itself that will be discussed in another issue, but it helps us, at this point, to see that there is a present reality to New Jerusalem. Of course, this does not mean that there is no future reality to the city-bride. In fact, the glory of New Jerusalem is yet to come. Today, we dimly see the glory of the dwelling of God in spirit, just as we only experience an earnest of the spirit as we live in bodies of death and humiliation. It will take the first resurrection and transfiguration for New Jerusalem to begin to come into sharper focus, but even so, it will not be until God's day that she will be revealed in all her fullness.

Now, to add to the thought of New Jerusalem being a people, especially God's dwelling in spirit, let us consider a word from Peter. You see, John and Paul were not the only ones to have revelation on the matter. After all, Peter was looking for God's day and new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:11-13). Peter described the present reality of New Jerusalem as living stones. Compare Peter's description with John's description.

(4) To whom having approached [as to] a living stone, on the one hand having been rejected by people, on the other hand chosen [and] precious before God, (5) and you yourselves, as living stones, are being built up [into] a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:4-5 ALT)

(18) And the building material of its wall was jasper, and the city [was] pure gold, like pure glass. (19) the foundations of the wall of the city have been adorned with every precious stone: the first foundation [with] jasper, the second [with] sapphire, the third [with] chalcedony, the fourth [with] emerald, (20) the fifth [with] sardonyx, the sixth [with] carnelian, the seventh [with] chrysolite, the eighth [with] beryl, the ninth [with] topaz, the tenth [with] chrysoprasus, the eleventh [with] jacinth, the twelfth [with] amethyst. (Revelation 21:18-20 ALT)

Christ is a living stone, and in Him, God is building a spiritual house of living stones. This is the whole building, being fitted together, growing into a holy temple in the Lord. It is a temple of living stones, not dead, inorganic stones hewed out of the earth. These are living stones born from above by the spirit of God. Peter describes this house as a holy priesthood, and John describes it as being built with the precious stones that adorned the garments of Aaron and his sons (Exodus 28:17-21). In other words, the precious stones of New Jerusalem speak of the kingdom of priests (Revelation 5:10; 20:6).

The sons of Israel in the days of Jesus were looking for the glory of God to return to Herod's temple; they were looking for God to manifest Himself once again in a temple of stones. But Jesus shocked them with a truth that they had not expected.

Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up!” [cp. Matt 26:61; Mark 14:58] (John 2:19 ALT)

Of course, Jesus was speaking of the temple of His body, but it was more than just His body, for the body of Christ came forth after He ascended to His Father’s throne. This body is *the* Christ, the Head and His body, a temple of the Holy Spirit, a temple of living stones. And this temple represents the Stone Kingdom that will crush Babylon and lead the nations in righteousness until it fills the whole earth (Daniel 2:35).

Quoting the prophets, Peter declared that Christ, the living stone rejected by those of the same blood, is the cornerstone of the entire building. The sons of Israel fell over or stumbled over this stone; they were blind to the truth, and it tripped them up.

(6) For this reason, it is contained in the Scripture, “Look! I lay in Zion a stone, a cornerstone, chosen, precious, and the one believing on Him shall by no means be put to shame [or, be disappointed].” [Isa 28:16] **(7) Therefore, the honor [is] to you, the ones believing. But to the ones disobeying [or, refusing to believe], “[The] stone which the builders rejected, this [one] became for [the] head of [the] corner [or, the chief cornerstone]”** [Psalm 118:22] **(8) and “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offence,” who stumble at the word, refusing to believe, to which also they were appointed.** [Isaiah 8:14] **(9) But you [are] a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people [for God’s own] possession, in order that you shall proclaim the excellencies of the One having called you out of darkness into His marvelous light,** [Exod 9:16; Isaiah 43:20] **(10) who at one time [were] not a people, but now [are the] people of God; the ones not having found mercy, but now having found mercy.** (1 Peter 2:6-10 ALT)

But then notice how Peter amplified on the spiritual house, the holy priesthood. We could say New Jerusalem is a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God and for God. They are the saints in light, which not only speaks of truth but of glory. All of these descriptors point to New Jerusalem, the city of the glory of God. But there is more, for it is not only a holy priesthood but a royal priesthood, which speaks of priestly-kings according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:1-3). Thus, New Jerusalem signifies the reign of Christ through His king-priests.

Of course, there is much to be gleaned from these verses and more will be presented in later issues, but for now, it is important to lay a foundation of these truths upon which we can build our understanding.

Now, returning to Paul, we again see that this spiritual house of living stones is not complete; it has been under construction for many millennia, and it has not been completed nor will it be until God’s day. Today, it is building itself up in love. Paul describes New Jerusalem as the body of Christ that is connected to the living Head from which she receives life.

(15) But speaking the truth in love, we shall increase to Him [in] all [things], who is the head, Christ, (16) from whom the entire body being joined together and united by means of the supply of every joint [or, by what every joint supplies], according to the working of the measure of each individual part, causing the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:15-16 ALT)

The head, from whom the entire body, by means of the joints and ligaments being supplied and being knit together, grows [with] the growth of God. (Colossians 2:19 ALT)

Ultimately, God causes the growth of His city. He is the Architect and the Builder. It is His building project, and He has not entrusted the growth to anyone. He will not fail. Through His Son, the Father will reach His purpose of dwelling, not only in, but among all mankind. How do we know? Because John saw the living stones coming down out of heaven, having the glory of God!