

Jerusalem — God’s Mountain-Sanctuary

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The Old Testament (OT) prophets portray salvation as a gathering and return of the people to God’s temple or mountain-sanctuary in Jerusalem — their readmittance into his presence.

Gentiles are at times included in this gathering.¹

What is the source of this prophetic imagery?

To answer, we must start at the very beginning!

1. The Garden of Eden was God’s original temple or mountain-sanctuary.²
Ezekiel (in 28:13-14) specifically calls Eden “the holy mountain of God”.
There is every reason to believe that Moses, the author of the Torah (or Pentateuch), also intended for the Garden of Eden to be viewed this way. In other words, the account of the Garden, and Adam’s banishment from it, serve as a backdrop to the Mosaic Law and Covenant.
2. Within the Garden Adam served as a priest, enjoying intimate fellowship with his Creator.
The description of Adam’s task in the Garden, namely, “to work it and keep it” (Gen 2:15), employs the same Hebrew verbs that are used to describe the Levites’ tasks in the tabernacle (Num 3:7-8).³
3. Sin resulted in Adam’s banishment from God’s presence and expulsion from the Garden.
Death ensued (Gen 2:17; Rom 6:23) — also for Adam’s descendants.⁴
Following the Fall, Scripture portrays salvation as a gracious readmittance into God’s presence — into his temple or mountain-sanctuary.
Related to this, several OT prophets employ Edenic imagery to describe Israel’s restoration.⁵

¹ See Isaiah 2:2-3; 11:6-10; 25:6-7; 27:13; 56:6-8; 65:25; 66:20; Jeremiah 3:17; Ezekiel 20:40; Micah 4:1-2.

² See Lifsa Schachter, “The Garden of Eden as God’s First Sanctuary,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2013, pp. 73-77: https://jbnqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/412/jbq_41_2_gardenofeden.pdf.

See also Donald W. Parry, “Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary.” In: Donald W. Parry, editor, *Temples of the Ancient World* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Company, 1994), pp. 126-151:

<https://emp.byui.edu/SatterfieldB/Rel327/Readings/Garden%20of%20Eden%20Prototype%20Sanctuary.pdf>.

³ These verbs are *ʾābad* (Strong’s H5647), “to serve, perform, work”, and *šāmar* (Strong’s H8104), “to keep, guard, watch”.

⁴ Adam’s descendants died (Genesis 5: “and he died. ... and he died. ...”, etc.), not so much for their own personal sin and inheritance of his corrupted nature, but because his primal act of disobedience was imputed to them. He was their Representative and Covenant Head (Rom 5:12ff.). See the online article by Matt Perman: *What Is the Biblical Evidence for the Imputation of Adam’s Sin?*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-the-biblical-evidence-for-the-imputation-of-adams-sin>.

⁵ See, for example, Isaiah 11:6-9; 35:9; 51:3; 65:25; Jeremiah 31:12; Ezekiel 36:35; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13.

4. While still in the Garden, Adam and Eve sought to cover their shame with fig leaves (Gen 3:7). But God replaced their (inadequate) covering with the raw and bloodied hides of slain animals (Gen 3:21). Their radical rebellion required a radical response.⁶
5. Adam was expelled, “and at the east of the garden of Eden [God] placed the cherubim ... to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen 3:24). Eden was evidently accessible only from the east. Moreover, when “Cain went away from the presence of the LORD” he settled further to the east (Gen 4:16). This suggests that Adam and his family remained for a time near Eden, near God’s “presence”, no doubt worshipping before him there and presenting sacrifices.
6. The beautiful and fruitful Promised Land was intended to remind of Eden (Ex 3:8; Dt 11:9-12; etc.). In leading his people to this land, God was regathering them to his “holy abode” — his mountain-sanctuary. Exodus 15:13, 17 (The Song of Moses):

“You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode. You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O LORD, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established.”⁷
7. With the covenant at Sinai Israel became bound to Yahweh as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6). Israel became his “sanctuary” and “dominion” (Ps 114:1-2). As Spurgeon notes, “The whole people were the shrine of Deity, and their camp was one great temple.”⁸
8. In the desert, craftsmen constructed the tabernacle and its furnishings (Exodus 36 – 38). The tabernacle signified that God dwelt in the midst of his people (Ex 25:8; 29:44-46; cf. Lev 26:11). The earthly tabernacle was modeled after its heavenly counterpart (Heb 8:2, 5; 9:24; cf. Ex 26:30). The tabernacle’s inner sanctuary (the Most Holy Place) housed the Ark. God (symbolically) sat enthroned between the cherubim on the Ark (Ps 80:1; 99:1; 1Sam 4:4; 2Sam 6:2; 2Kgs 19:15). Finally, the Shekinah glory filled the completed tabernacle, showing that God himself had come to dwell there (Ex 40:34-35).⁹
9. The tabernacle and its ministry exhibited the only way for sinners to approach a holy God. It reminded of Eden and showed how fellowship with God could be restored:
 - The tabernacle represented holy ground. Even the outer courtyard was considered holy (Lev 6:16, 26).
 - There was but one way for an Israelite to enter the tabernacle courtyard — via the Entrance Gate on the east side (Ex 27:13, ESV).¹⁰ As with the Garden, entry was only from the east (cf. Gen 3:24).
 - Once in the courtyard the worshiper would present his sacrifice (a ram, bull, goat, lamb, dove or pigeon) to the priests standing beside the bronze altar of burnt offering (Ex 40:6; Lev 1:2-5). The animal would be killed, and the worshiper forgiven.¹¹

This was a place of death and bloodshed; watching the lifeblood drain from the animal, the worshiper was reminded of what he himself deserved, for that animal took his place.¹²

⁶ As Carl Trueman notes, “Sin is violent, lethal rebellion against God; and biblical grace is God’s violent, raw and bloody response.” Carl R. Trueman, *Grace Alone: Salvation as a Gift of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), p. 31.

⁷ The entire Promised Land is here regarded as God’s holy abode and mountain-sanctuary.

⁸ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, Exposition of Psalm 114. Via the Spurgeon Archive website: <https://archive.spurgeon.org/treasury/ps114.php#expo>.

⁹ From R.C. Sproul: “According to the Old Testament, the *shekinah* was the visible manifestation of the invisible God. The *shekinah* was a radiant cloud or brilliant light within a cloud that signaled the immediate presence of God.” See: <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/witnessing-his-glory>.

¹⁰ See: https://www.bible-history.com/tabernacle/tab4the_entrance_gate.htm.

¹¹ See: https://www.bible-history.com/tabernacle/tab4the_bronze_altar.htm.

¹² Identification with the animal, and the transference of sins to it, was signified by the placing of one’s hand(s) on its head prior to slaughtering it (Lev 1:4; 4:4, 24, 29, 33; 16:20-22).

- The altar’s location at the tabernacle’s only entrance showed that God could not be approached apart from sacrifice. God’s holiness was such that human rebellion had to be dealt with in this radical, lethal manner.
- The tabernacle’s golden lampstand (the menorah) resembled an almond tree. On each of its six side branches there were “three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with a calyx and petals”, with four such cups on the central stem (Ex 25:33-34, HCSB). As a symbolic tree it reminded of Eden, probably of the tree of life itself.
- The priests serving in the sanctuary represented Man (partially) restored to God’s presence. They wore linen garments (Ex 28:39, 42). Woolen garments were forbidden because they would result in sweat (cf. Eze 44:17-18). As David Chilton observes:

In Genesis 3:18-19, sweat is an aspect of fallen man’s labor under death and the Curse; the priest, as the Restored Man, was required to wear the light material of linen to show the removal of the Curse in salvation.¹³

- Though dwelling with his people, God nevertheless remained inaccessible, sequestered away in the cube-shaped Most Holy Place. It was there that God (symbolically) sat enthroned on the Ark.¹⁴
- An inner curtain that separated off the Most Holy Place (Ex 26:33) was called the “veil of the screen” (ESV) or “shielding curtain” (NIV), because it concealed the Ark (Ex 35:12; 39:34; 40:21; Num 4:5).¹⁵ As related in Exodus 26:31-37, cherubim were embroidered on this inner curtain but not on the similar outer curtain at the entrance to the tabernacle itself. The cherubim on the inner curtain recalled those that guarded the entrance to the Garden of Eden following Adam’s banishment (Gen 3:24).

(All of this “tabernacle symbolism” was intended with Solomon’s temple as well — see point 19, below.)

10. The overarching concern of the book of Leviticus is the need for God’s people to be holy:

“You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (19:2; cf. 11:44-45; 20:7, 26; 22:32).

The focus on clean versus unclean served to instill the need for perfection in God’s presence — only then could he continue to dwell in their midst (15:31; Num 5:3).

Animal sacrifices served to instill the principle of substitutionary atonement: through the shedding of blood sin was atoned for (17:11) and people and items were cleansed (e.g., 8:15, 30; 16:18-19; cf. Heb 9:21-22).

Physical perfection was required in both the priests (21:17-23) and in the animals they sacrificed.

Various skin diseases symbolized spiritual death (chaps. 13 – 14).

Bodily discharges (of blood, semen, etc.) likewise symbolized a loss of life and rendered one unclean.

Contacting something unclean defiled and disqualified (e.g., 11:43; 20:25; 22:4).

All such imperfections pointed to spiritual maladies that disqualified from God’s service or presence.

Sometimes people were entirely excluded from the Israelite camp (e.g., 13:45-46; Num 5:1-4; 12:10-15;

31:19-24; 2Kgs 7:3). Unclean persons thus excluded were to exhibit their grief at being separated from God by tearing their clothes, having unkempt hair, and having their faces partially covered (13:45; cf. 10:6).

Dietary restrictions (chap. 11; Dt 14:3-21) inhibited fellowship with non-Israelites. Like circumcision and Sabbath observance, these laws underscored Israel’s uniqueness: as God’s people they must be different to and separate from the surrounding unclean nations (20:24-26; cf. Ex 12:48; 31:13; Eze 44:9; Ac 10:28).

¹³ David Chilton, *Paradise Restored* (Tyler, TX: Reconstruction Press, 1985), p. 44.

¹⁴ Unauthorized entry into God’s presence in the Most Holy Place would prove lethal (Lev 16:1-2; cf. 10:1-2).

¹⁵ It was this curtain in Herod’s temple that was torn when Jesus died, to signify the believer’s direct access into the presence of God.

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place carrying the blood of atonement (16:11-15). In this way the people were cleansed and forgiven (16:30, 34), and the sanctuary itself was cleansed and rendered fit for God's habitation (16:16, 33).

All these ceremonies were intended to point to the sin which defiles and disqualifies us before God.¹⁶

11. For obedience God promised to "walk" (Hebrew verb: *hālak*) among the people even as he had walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden (Lev 26:12; cf. Gen 3:8).
12. Thus, both the Law and the tabernacle service emphasized the fact of Man's banishment:
God was far removed from the worshipper; none could approach except through God's chosen mediator and the shedding of blood (Heb 9:7); any non-Levite who drew near was to be put to death (Num 1:51).
All this pointing to the need for something better — for the "good things" that would come under the New Covenant (Heb 9:11; 10:1).
13. Moses, in Deuteronomy, envisions a place in Canaan that God himself will choose and where his "name" will reside. It is to that (unique) place that the Israelites must go in order to worship him and enter his presence (Dt 12:5-7, 11; 14:23; 16:2, 11; 26:2). Not that God will actually dwell there, but his "name" will stand in for him since it represents all that he is. (See point 18, below.)
14. Moses further anticipates the Israelites' future unfaithfulness and expulsion from the land:
God will scatter them among the nations (Dt 4:27; 28:36, 64; 29:28).
Such expulsion and exile will constitute the nation's "death".¹⁷
Israel's disobedience and consequent exile/death will effectively recapitulate Adam's experience in the Garden (cf. Hos 6:7). Israel was faced, as it were, with the same choice of life or death that Adam faced — life would come from obedience to God's word; death, from disobedience (Dt 30:15-20; 32:47).¹⁸
15. David, around 1003 BC, captured the fortress of Zion from the Jebusites.
This was situated on the southern slope of Mount Moriah, above the Gihon spring.
David took up residence in the city and renamed it for himself: the "City of David" (2Sam 5:6-9).
This became his new capital city, from which he ruled his kingdom.
16. Sometime later, David purchased the northern summit of Mount Moriah from Ornan the Jebusite.
Solomon constructed the temple on this elevated site (2Chr 3:1; cf. 1Chr 21:18 – 22:1).
Significantly, Moriah was the region where Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac, and the mountain upon which God would himself provide the ultimate Lamb (Gen 22:2, 8, 14).
At the temple's dedication, the Ark was relocated to its new home. The Shekinah glory immediately filled the temple, signifying that God himself had come to dwell there (1Kgs 8:10-13).

¹⁶ As Jesus emphasizes in Mark 7:15, 18-23, defilement comes not from imbibing "unclean" food but from our sinful hearts within.

¹⁷ Disobedience will cause Israel to "perish" or be destroyed (Dt 4:26; 6:15; 7:4; 8:19-20; 11:17; 28:20; 45, 48, 51, 61, 63; 30:18). As Kenneth Turner observes, "The people will continue to exist physically in exile; yet, as a single entity, Israel is said to 'perish' or 'be destroyed.' So, it is not Israel as an historical or socio-religious people, but Israel as Yahweh's elect son and servant (Dt 1:31; 7:6; 14:1) that is put to death. Exile constitutes the death of Israel as a nation in covenant [with Yahweh]."

Kenneth J. Turner, quoted by Jason S. DeRouchie in *Why the Third Day? The Promise of Resurrection in All of Scripture*, <https://jasonderouchie.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/2019-Why-the-Third-Day-Resurrection-DeRouchie.pdf>.

¹⁸ As noted by Hosea (in 6:7), the sin of Adam (and of Israel) involved covenant disloyalty towards Yahweh. To "know" good and evil (cf. Gen 3:22) is to choose or decide for oneself what is right and wrong; it is to act independently of God and to reject his word. Moses, in Deuteronomy 1:39, refers to "your children, who today have no knowledge of good or evil ..." Very young children are morally naïve and unconcerned with issues of right or wrong.

17. As Jerusalem grew, *Zion* came to refer to the whole mountain including the temple area (cf. 1Kgs 8:1).¹⁹ Thus, Zion was the “hill/mountain of the LORD”, his “holy hill/mountain” (e.g., Ps 2:6; 24:3; 48:1-2; Isa 2:3). The name further came to denote the whole nation or people of God (e.g., Isa 49:14; 51:16). As a term of endearment, Zion signifies the ideal city — the holy city loved and redeemed by God.
18. The temple served as God’s royal palace, the earthly counterpart of his heavenly abode. God sat enthroned between the cherubim on the Ark (Ps 80:1; 99:1; 1Sam 4:4; 2Sam 6:2; 2Kgs 19:15). The temple and Ark were also his royal “footstool” (1Chr 28:2; Ps 99:5; 132:7; Isa 60:13; Lam 2:1; Eze 43:7). Solomon regularly refers to God’s “name” being in the temple (1Kgs 5:3, 5; 8:16-20, 29, 44, 48). He wants to avoid saying that God actually lives there, for he knows that God dwells in and answers prayer from heaven (1Kgs 8:27, 30, 32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 45, 49). Yet, God’s presence in the temple was real, since his “name” represents all that he is.
19. For Solomon’s temple (and for Ezekiel’s idealized temple):
- Entry was from the east (Eze 8:16; 47:1).
 - The worshiper approached via the altar of burnt offering in the inner court (2Chr 8:12).
 - The temple’s wooden walls and doors were adorned with carvings of flowers, gourds, palm trees and cherubim (1Kgs 6:15-35; cf. Eze 41:17-20) — again, reminiscent of Eden.
20. In the Psalms, holiness and moral integrity are the necessary prerequisites for approaching God and living in his presence (e.g., Ps 15:1-5; 24:3-4). Not sacrifices or ritual purity, as required in the surrounding pagan cultures.
21. God sent the Israelites into exile — the northern kingdom through the agency of the Assyrians (733-722 BC), and the southern kingdom through the Babylonians (from 597 BC). In 586 BC Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed; many more of the people were exiled (2Kgs 25:9-12). Sin was the cause of the people’s exile (2 Kings 24:20):
- For because of the anger of the LORD it came to the point in Jerusalem and Judah that he cast them out from his presence.*
- Exile was an expulsion from God’s presence (see also 2 Kings 13:23; 17:18-23; Jeremiah 7:15; 23:39). It was a recapitulation of Adam’s expulsion from Eden (cf. Hos 6:7). Indeed, the exile of God’s people in Assyria and Babylon epitomized the universal exile of all mankind in Adam. As aforementioned, exile was a type of death. Israel’s return and restoration would therefore be, to all intents, a resurrection from the dead (Isa 26:19; Eze 37:1-14).
22. Salvation would entail a return to God’s holy mountain (e.g., Isa 11:9; 27:13; 56:7; 57:13; 65:25; 66:20). Several OT prophets anticipate God’s own return to Zion to dwell with his redeemed people; he will dwell in their midst forever (Isa 52:8; Eze 37:26-28; 43:4-9; 48:35; Joel 3:17, 21; Zec 2:10; 8:3).
23. Isaiah (ca. 740 BC) anticipates Jerusalem’s future judgment as well as her final restoration (Isa 1:24 – 2:4). Ultimately Mt. Zion will be the highest of the mountains, visible from and attracting the attention of distant nations (2:2). Foreigners will come to the temple to enquire of God. And so, from “out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations ...” (2:3-4). Both here and in 9:6-7; 11:1-10; 16:5; 32:1, Isaiah is anticipating Messiah’s universal kingdom. All of which is fulfilled via the gospel: Our reconciliation with God in Christ allows us all — Jews and Gentiles alike — to be spiritually admitted into God’s presence in “Jerusalem” (Heb 12:22-23; Rev 22:14).

¹⁹ Biblical Zion is the eastern hill of Jerusalem. From the 4th century on, Christian writers have mistakenly applied the name to Jerusalem’s western hill. See the following Bible Hub article: *Mount Zion (Jerusalem)*, https://bibleatlas.org/mount_zion.htm.

24. In Isaiah, God promises to someday invite all the world's nations to a sumptuous feast on Mount Zion, where he will "swallow up" death itself for them (Isa 24:23; 25:6-8).
Jesus has fulfilled this; he has brought the "wine" of God's kingdom (Isa 25:6; Jn 2:1-11), and he invites people to participate in the feast via the gospel (Lk 13:28-30; 14:15-24).
For those who are in Christ, death has been effectively abolished; eternal life is their present possession (Jn 6:50; 8:51; 11:25-26; 1Cor 15:54-55; 2Tim 1:10).
25. Jeremiah (ca. 615 BC) similarly anticipates the Gentile nations coming to seek Yahweh in Jerusalem. This will take place after Israel and Judah have returned from exile and settled back in their own land:
At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem ... (Jeremiah 3:17; cf. 3:14-18).
26. In Daniel's vision of the messianic kingdom, God's holy mountain grows to fill the whole world (Dan 2:34-35, 44-45). This is also implied by Isaiah 11:9.
27. Several OT prophets speak of life-imparting water that will someday emanate from Jerusalem or its temple (Eze 47:1-12; Joel 3:18; Zec 14:8). In their own day, the Gihon spring supplied Jerusalem with potable water and provided "living water" for the ritual cleansings of the temple service.²⁰
(Recall, also, the river of Eden that supported luxurious growth in that original mountain-sanctuary.)
Jesus offers sinners "living water" — the gift of God's Spirit to impart and sustain spiritual life (Jn 4:10; 7:38).
John takes up all this imagery in the book of Revelation (Rev 7:17; 22:1-2, 17).
28. Jesus in his incarnation "dwelt" among us (Jn 1:14).
The Greek verb *skēnoō* (Strong's G4637) means "to pitch and have one's tent".
John intends to show that, just as the tabernacle symbolized Yahweh's presence among his people (Ex 25:8; 29:44-46), so also Jesus was truly God while he was present with us on earth.
Moreover, Jesus displayed the glory and majesty of God (Jn 1:14) — the reference being to the Shekinah glory that previously resided in the tabernacle and temple.²¹
29. Jesus declared himself to be God's new temple (Jn 2:19-21), for it was through him alone that people could have access to God. (Cf. John 14:6: "I am the way, No one comes to the Father except through me.")
Additionally, his body was the place where sin would be finally dealt with.
30. The "tree" on which Jesus died (Ac 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; 1Pet 2:24), and on which he shouldered God's curse (Gal 3:13), becomes for us the very tree of life and the source of every spiritual blessing.
31. At the very moment when Jesus died, the inner curtain of Herod's temple — the one that separated off the Most Holy Place (Ex 26:33) — was torn from top to bottom (Mt 27:51).
Under the New Covenant, believers have direct access into the presence of God (Heb 10:19-20).
32. The earthly tabernacle was modeled after its heavenly counterpart (Heb 8:5; 9:24; cf. Ex 25:9; 26:30).
Heavenly sanctuary refers to the (heavenly) throne-room, the very presence of God — which (according to the book of Hebrews) actually corresponds more with the symbolism of the Most Holy Place.
Hebrews 9:6-8 notes that the very existence of an outer tabernacle (the Holy Place) emphasized the fact that close access to God (as symbolized by the once-a-year entrance of the high priest into the Most Holy Place) was not permitted under the Mosaic Covenant. Full access had to await the "time of reformation" (Heb 9:10) — literally, "until the time of setting things right."
Jesus as our high priest has entered the true, heavenly sanctuary; he serves on our behalf in God's very presence (Heb 8:1-2; 9:24). He entered this (true) sanctuary once for all, offering his own blood for atonement (Heb 9:11-12, 25-26; cf. 7:26-27). As our eternal high priest, he continually intercedes for us (Heb 7:24-25; Rom 8:34; 1Jn 2:1). Through him access to God is fully restored (Heb 10:19-22).

²⁰ Running or "living" water was required for the various temple rituals (Lev 14:5-6, 50-52; 15:13; Num 19:17).

²¹ See points 8 and 16, and footnote 9.

From the Cambridge Commentary, notes for Hebrews 9:9:

9. *which was a figure for the time then present*] i.e. And this outer Tabernacle is a parable for the present time. By “the present time” he means the prae-Christian epoch in which the unconverted Jews were still (practically) living. The full inauguration of the New Covenant of which Christ had prophesied as his Second Coming, began with the final annulment of the Old, which was only completed when the Temple fell, and when the observance of the Levitic system thus became (by the manifest interposition of God in history) a thing simply *impossible*. A Christian was already living in “the Future Aeon” (*Olam habba*); a Jew who had not embraced the Gospel still belonged to “the present time” (*olam hazzeh ó καιρός ó ένεστηκώς*). The meaning of the verse is that the very existence of an *outer* Tabernacle (“the Holy Place”) emphasized the fact that close access to God (of which the entrance of the High Priest into the Holiest was a symbol) was not permitted under the Old Covenant.²²

The following table shows how the tabernacle’s Most Holy Place anticipated the blessings of the New Covenant (with references from Hebrews 9 and 10):

| Holy Place | Most Holy Place |
|---|---|
| “The first tent/tabernacle” (9:6, 8, Greek text) = the outer room of the tabernacle | “The second” [tent/tabernacle] (9:7, Greek text) = the inner room of the tabernacle |
| Corresponds with the Old (Mosaic) Covenant | Corresponds with the New Covenant |
| “The present time” (9:9, HCSB) = pre-70 AD | Anticipated the “time of reformation” (9:10) |
| Earthly sanctuary | Heavenly sanctuary (God’s very presence) |
| Priests regularly served (9:6) | High priest entered but once a year (9:7) |
| Most Holy Place closed (9:8) | Opened by Jesus’ death (10:19) |
| Sacrifices and rituals ineffectual (9:9; 10:4, 11) | Jesus’ death effectual (9:12) |
| Heaven off-limits; saints entered Paradise at death | Entry into heaven via resurrection (AD 70) Direct entry post-70 AD |

33. Each individual Christian is a temple of God, indwelt by his Spirit (1Cor 6:19).

God’s Spirit can indwell us only because he views us as perfectly holy and righteous in Christ.

34. The Church, too, is God’s temple in which he dwells by his Spirit (1Cor 3:16-17; 2Cor 6:16; Eph 2:20-22).

It is comprised of individual “living stones” who together constitute a “holy priesthood” that offers up “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God” (1Pet 2:5).

Jesus is himself the cornerstone that holds it all together (Eph 2:20; 1Pet 2:7).

In this way the Church fulfills OT prophecy (2Cor 6:16; 1Pet 2:9; cf. Ex 19:6; Lev 26:11-12; Eze 37:27).

²² The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, notes for Hebrews 9. Via the Bible Hub website: <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/cambridge/hebrews/9.htm>.

Note the reference here to Jesus’ Second Coming, which brought about the termination of the Mosaic system via the temple’s destruction. In support, see Hebrews 8:13; 9:28; 10:25, 37.

35. John's final vision of the New Jerusalem ties all these threads together.

The new heaven and earth represents the new world order that Jesus has brought.

The New Jerusalem is the capital city of this new order — its seat of government.

Christians (spiritually and legally) "live" within the city, having been gathered from spiritual exile into God's presence. As Kurt Simmons observes:

The new Jerusalem symbolically describes the covenantal habitation of the saints under the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the new heavens and earth [describes] the world beneath Jesus' righteous dominion.²³

The New Testament is very clear:

Already, this side of eternity, we are citizens of this heavenly city.

See Galatians 4:26; Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 12:22-23.

Here is what the New Jerusalem depicts:

- With the city's descent God himself has come down to dwell with his people (Rev 21:3), in fulfillment of his original intent for Israel and his promises of restoration (Lev 26:11-12; Eze 37:27; Zec 2:10).
- The city's cube shape (Rev 21:16) recalls the temple's cube-shaped Most Holy Place where God sat enthroned (1Kgs 6:20).²⁴ The city is the new and final Most Holy Place; its citizens live in God's very presence, serving before him as priests (Rev 1:6; 5:10; 7:15; 22:3 [KJV, NASB]; cf. 1Pet 2:5, 9). They enjoy unrestricted access to him; what the high priest could do but once a year, believers can now enjoy continually (Heb 10:19-22).
- Within the city we see Eden restored: the "river of the water of life" with the tree of life on its banks, along with the absence of any "curse" (Rev 22:1-3).
- Those in the city see God's face (Rev 22:4).
Adam was banished from God's presence, but here, the saints are fully restored.
- Those in the city — who have been washed from sin — may eat from the tree of life (Rev 22:14).
- There is no defilement of sin or sinners in the temple-city (Rev 21:27; 22:15; cf. Isa 4:3; 35:8; 52:1; 60:21; Eze 44:9; Zec 14:21).

John's point is obvious: Christ — the definitive deliverer — has ended our banishment and exile by dealing with sin. His death has fully restored us to God's presence in the inner sanctuary (Mt 27:51; Heb 10:19-20).

The long exile that began with Adam is finally over.

36. New Jerusalem was also the promised (heavenly) reward for those who had died.

The OT saints, and early Christians who had died, were admitted into heaven in AD 70.

These were gathered from Hades-Paradise into the heavenly city via resurrection (Rev 20:11-15).

See Hebrews 11:10, 16, 35; 12:23; Revelation 22:7.

And of course, this heavenly city is also our own posthumous destiny.

²³ From Kurt's online article: *The New Jerusalem, the Covenantal Habitation of the Saints*, <http://www.preteristcentral.com>. Under his Miscellaneous Studies section.

²⁴ The Most Holy Place of the tabernacle was a cube with sides of 4.6 meters (10 cubits); that of Solomon's temple was a cube with sides of 9.1 meters (20 cubits; see 1 Kings 6:20); that of Ezekiel's idealized temple was also a cube with sides of 9.1 meters (20 cubits; see Ezekiel 41:4). The New Jerusalem is a cube with sides of 2200 km (= 12,000 stadia, a symbolic number).

Conclusion

From Genesis to Revelation salvation is represented as a return to God's "mountain-sanctuary" — a gracious readmittance into his presence.

The Garden of Eden was God's original mountain-sanctuary.

The tabernacle, the Promised Land, and the Jerusalem temple were all reminders of Eden.

OT prophets anticipated a final regathering of God's people into his presence in Jerusalem.

Prophecies of Jerusalem's restoration were definitively fulfilled with the gathering of God's people into this temple-city under the New Covenant:

Those on earth were gathered through the gospel, then also when the city descended from heaven in AD 70.

Also in AD 70, the deceased saints were gathered from Hades-Paradise, via resurrection, into heaven.

Appendix

The Psalms attach the following significance to Jerusalem/Zion/God's holy mountain:

- The city is God's dwelling place, where he sits enthroned (Ps 9:11; 46:4; 48:1-2; 76:2; 132:13-14).²⁵
- God rules from Zion (Ps 47:8; 68:16; 99:1-2).
- From God in Zion comes judgment (Ps 50:1-4; cf. Isa 66:6).
- From God in Zion comes deliverance and help (Ps 14:7; 20:2) and blessing (Ps 128:5).
- God's presence protects the city, ensuring its security (Ps 46:5; 48:3-8, 12-13; 125:1).
- God acts in judgment to deliver the city from Gentile invaders (Ps 76:2-6).
- Jerusalem's "river" symbolizes the continual sustenance and refreshment that God's own presence affords (Ps 46:4; cf. Jer 2:13; 17:13; Rev 22:1-2).²⁶
- One must pray for and seek the city's peace, prosperity, and restoration (Ps 51:18; 122:6-9).
- God loves and has chosen Zion above all else (Ps 78:68; 87:2; 132:13).
- Prayer is to be directed towards God in his sanctuary (Ps 5:7; 28:2; 138:2; cf. 1Kgs 8:38).
For from there he answers prayer (Ps 3:4; 18:6).
- God gathers his chosen into his presence there (Ps 65:1-4).
- Jerusalem is where Yahweh is worshiped and praised (Ps 9:14; 43:3-4; 99:9; 102:21; 122:1-4).
In time, the nations also will assemble to worship there (Ps 102:22; cf. Ps 86:9; 1Kgs 8:41-43; Isa 2:2-3).
- There, sacrifices are offered and vows are fulfilled in response to God's deliverance (Ps 50:14; 56:12; 66:13-15; 116:17-19).
- God's people long for his house; they undergo pilgrimage to appear before him there (Ps 84:1-7, 10).
- Holiness is a prerequisite for ascending or living there (Ps 15:1-5; 24:3-4).
- It's a great privilege to be a citizen of the city — especially a native-born one (Ps 87:4-6).
- God's exiled people long for their return to Zion (Ps 137:1ff.); they are overjoyed when he gathers and restores them and their city is rebuilt (Ps 126:1ff.; 147:2).
- David's royal descendants ruled and judged from Jerusalem (Ps 122:5; 132:17); so too will the Messiah (Ps 2:6; 110:2).

All these features should now be related, not to the literal city located in the Middle East, but to the wholly new Jerusalem that John saw in Revelation 21 – 22.

For the New Jerusalem comprises the true people of God — the Church, Christ's bride, the new temple indwelt by God's Spirit (Rev 21:2, 9; Eph 5:25-32; 1Cor 3:16-17; 2Cor 6:16; Eph 2:19-22).

It comprises believing Jews and Gentiles who are reconciled to God in Christ, and who enjoy his presence and favor (Rev 21:3; 22:3-4).

And it further represents our final (posthumous) heavenly abode, where there will absolutely be no more death, pain, tears, or curse (Rev 21:4; 22:3).

Yet already this side of eternity, we are citizens of this heavenly city (Gal 4:26; Php 3:20; Heb 12:22-23).

²⁵ God of course dwells in heaven; Jerusalem and its temple served as mere earthly symbols or representations of his heavenly abode (Ps 11:4; Heb 12:22; Rev 11:19; 21:2). Solomon recognized this in his prayer of dedication for the temple: God dwells in and answers prayer from heaven itself (see 1 Kings 8:27, 30, 32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 45, 49).

²⁶ Psalm 46:4 is probably alluding to the Gihon spring which supplied Jerusalem with potable water.