COGMA

Church of God Mission Academy

STUDY GUIDE 42

3 OF 4

The New Testament Church

STUDY GUIDE 3 OF 4:

Zion And The New Jerusalem

An overview of the Church's heavenly identity and dwelling.



Equipping and empowering for effective service

2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

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Important Points

- COGMA does not claim to be infallible or the authority.
- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

COGMA therefore strongly advises that you prayerfully study the content of each Study Guide with the heart of a Berean (**Acts 17:10–12**).

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PREFACE

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The Bible uses the language of cities, mountains and buildings to reveal spiritual truth. Among the most important of these pictures are Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem. These are not three different spiritual places. Scripture brings them together to reveal the Church of God, the present spiritual habitation of Jesus Christ among His born-again people.

The writer of Hebrews gives one of the clearest statements.

He wrote in **Hebrews 12:22-23**:

> *"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,"*

Notice the words *"ye are come."* The believers were not waiting for a future age before they could come to Mount Sion or the heavenly Jerusalem. They had already come to the city of the living God and to the Church of the firstborn.

This helps us understand the vision given to John. John wrote in **Revelation 21:2**:

> *"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."*

The New Jerusalem is therefore not a future physical city that believers are still waiting to see descend from the sky. It is a spiritual city that came from God and represents the people among whom God dwells: His Church.

This truth was already pictured in the Old Testament through Zion. The Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 132:13-14**:

> *"For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it."*

Zion is connected with God's habitation. Under the New Covenant, that dwelling place is not a mountain, temple or earthly city. God dwells within His born-again people by His Spirit.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 3:16**:

> *"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"*

The Church is therefore the living fulfilment of the imagery of Zion and Jerusalem. Jesus Christ dwells within His people, and together they form His spiritual habitation.

This Study Guide will follow that Scriptural progression. We will begin with Zion in the Old Testament, trace the promise of God's habitation and the foundation laid in Zion, and then examine how the New Testament identifies Mount Sion with the heavenly Jerusalem and the Church of the firstborn.

We will also examine the New Jerusalem of Revelation and see why its meaning must be understood spiritually rather than as a future architectural city. The controlling truth is simple:

Zion is present. The heavenly Jerusalem is present. The New Jerusalem is present.

They reveal the one spiritual Church in whom Jesus Christ now dwells.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the picture of Zion help you understand God's living people in Christ?

Personal Reflection

Have you mainly pictured Zion as a future location rather than Christ's living people?

Action Step

Test your view of Zion using **Hebrews 12:22–23***. What should change in your faith and fellowship?*

INTRODUCTION: FROM EARTHLY CITY TO SPIRITUAL REALITY

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Throughout the Old Testament, Jerusalem and Mount Zion occupied an important physical place in the life of Israel. Jerusalem was the city associated with the Temple, while Zion became closely connected with God's dwelling place, His people and His kingdom. These literal places provided powerful pictures that pointed beyond themselves to a greater spiritual reality in Jesus Christ.

Under the New Covenant, Scripture directs our attention away from an earthly city as the final dwelling place of God. It reveals a heavenly Jerusalem, a spiritual Zion and a living temple made up of those who have been born again.

Two Jerusalems

Paul makes a clear distinction between earthly Jerusalem and the Jerusalem that is above.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 4:25-26**:

> *"For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."*

Paul speaks first of *"Jerusalem which now is"* and then of *"Jerusalem which is above."* These cannot simply be two descriptions of the same earthly city. One belongs to the earthly order, while the other belongs to the spiritual reality revealed through the New Covenant.

The Jerusalem that is above is therefore not identified by geographical boundaries, earthly walls or a physical temple. It belongs to the spiritual people of God.

Believers Have Already Come to Zion

The writer of Hebrews makes this even clearer by telling born-again believers where they had already come.

He wrote in **Hebrews 12:22-23**:

> *"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,"*

The words *"ye are come"* are essential. The believers were not being told that one day, in a future age, they would come to Mount Sion and the heavenly Jerusalem. They had already come.

These verses bring several expressions together: Mount Sion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and the Church of the firstborn. These are not presented as unrelated destinations. They describe the spiritual community into which God's people have come.

Zion must therefore be understood through the New Covenant rather than limited to an earthly mountain in Palestine.

The New Jerusalem Came From God

John uses similar language when describing the New Jerusalem.

John wrote in **Revelation 21:2**:

> *"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."*

The city comes *"from God out of heaven."* Its origin is heavenly rather than earthly. This agrees with Paul's Jerusalem *"which is above"* and with Hebrews describing *"the heavenly Jerusalem."*

The same spiritual reality appears under different biblical pictures. The New Jerusalem is not a future physical city that will one day descend as an enormous architectural structure. John is seeing spiritual truth through the language of a vision, and the city represents God's people.

From the Physical Picture to the Spiritual Fulfilment

This movement from physical picture to spiritual fulfilment is found throughout Scripture. God used visible places, buildings and events to prepare His people to understand spiritual realities that would be revealed in Jesus Christ.

Zion was a physical place, but its prophetic meaning reached beyond the mountain itself. Jerusalem was an earthly city, but Scripture reveals another Jerusalem that is above. The Temple was a physical building, but under the New Covenant God dwells within His people.

We must therefore allow the New Testament to explain the spiritual meaning of the Old Testament pictures. The fulfilment is not found by returning to the earthly shadow. It is found in Jesus Christ and in the people in whom He dwells.

The City Is a People

This is one of the most important principles for understanding Zion and the New Jerusalem. The final meaning is not primarily a location. It is a people.

The heavenly Jerusalem consists of those who belong to Jesus Christ. Mount Sion identifies the spiritual community of God's people. The New Jerusalem represents the Church of God, the living habitation in whom Jesus Christ dwells by His Spirit.

This reality was revealed in the Gospel Day. At Pentecost in A.D. 31, Jesus Christ came to dwell within His people as the Holy Spirit, and the Church was revealed as God's spiritual habitation.

The Old Testament city and mountain had served their purpose as pictures. The reality had come.

To understand Zion and the New Jerusalem, we must therefore move from the earthly picture to the spiritual fulfilment: from a geographical city to the living people of God in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does the Bible use the picture of a city for God's people?

Personal Reflection

When you think of God's city, do you picture buildings before the people in whom Christ lives?

Action Step

Have you valued buildings above God's people? Explain how your care for believers should change.

ZION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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To understand the New Testament meaning of Zion, we first need to see how the Old Testament develops the picture. Zion began as a physical location, but Scripture gradually used the name to speak of much more than a mountain or city. Zion became associated with God's presence, His people, His kingdom and the place where He would establish His saving purpose.

These Old Testament descriptions prepare us to understand why the New Testament later identifies Mount Sion with *"the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem"* and *"the general assembly and church of the firstborn."*

Zion Became Associated With God's People

The Old Testament repeatedly uses Zion in connection with the people who belong to God. The name therefore carries both a geographical picture and a spiritual meaning.

This becomes especially clear in the Psalms, where Zion is described as something established by God and connected with those who trust in Him.

The Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 125:1**:

> *"They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever."*

The verse moves beyond describing a physical mountain. Those who trust in the LORD are compared with Mount Zion, and the picture is one of spiritual security, stability and permanence.

A natural mountain can serve as a visible illustration, but the emphasis is upon God's people. Zion becomes a picture through which spiritual truth is taught. This prepares us for the New Testament, where Zion is no longer limited to physical geography but is identified with the spiritual people of God.

Zion Is Connected With God's Habitation

One of the strongest Old Testament themes associated with Zion is the dwelling place of God.

The Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 132:13-14**:

> *"For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it."*

The LORD chose Zion and desired it for His habitation. The language of dwelling is important because it points towards a central truth that will later be fulfilled in the New Covenant.

God's final purpose was not to dwell permanently within a geographical mountain, an earthly city or a physical building. These provided the picture, while the greater reality would be God dwelling within His people. The Old Testament therefore gives us the pattern before the New Testament reveals its fulfilment.

God Himself Establishes Zion

Zion is also presented as something established by God rather than created by human religious effort.

The Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 87:5-6**:

> *"And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her. The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there. Selah."*

Notice the words *"the highest himself shall establish her."* Zion belongs to God's work. These verses also connect Zion with people being born in her and with the LORD counting or recording those people.

The picture is therefore no longer simply stones, streets or geographical boundaries. People belong to Zion. This imagery becomes particularly important when the New Testament reveals that entrance into God's spiritual people takes place through the new birth.

For now, the Old Testament principle is clear: Zion is connected both with God's establishment and with a people who belong to Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Who establishes Zion, and why does that matter?

Personal Reflection

Have you given human organisation too much credit for establishing God's spiritual people?

Action Step

Where have you relied upon human organisation for Zion? Explain how you will trust God's work instead.

The Foundation Would Be Laid in Zion

The prophets also connected Zion with the coming of Jesus Christ.

Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 28:16**:

> *"Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste."*

God promised to lay a foundation in Zion. That foundation was not ultimately a physical stone placed within an earthly city. The New Testament identifies the promised stone with Jesus Christ.

The importance of this prophecy is clear. Zion, God's habitation and people, would be built upon the foundation God Himself provided. Jesus Christ is therefore central to the fulfilment of Zion, and Zion cannot be understood apart from Him.

Zion Pointed Beyond Earthly Geography

Taken together, these verses create a consistent picture. Zion is associated with those who trust in the LORD, God's chosen habitation, something established by God, people who are counted as belonging there, and the foundation stone that points to Jesus Christ.

These themes reach far beyond the physical features of ancient Jerusalem. The mountain was real and the city was real, yet God used those earthly realities to teach something greater. The physical location served as the picture, while the spiritual people of God are the fulfilment.

This is why we must be careful not to read New Covenant verses concerning Zion and immediately force them back into an earthly geographical meaning. The Old Testament itself was already preparing the language for a greater revelation.

The Old Testament Picture Prepares for Christ

The promise of the foundation stone is especially important because it shows that Zion's final meaning is inseparable from Jesus Christ. God did not establish His New Covenant people around an earthly mountain. He established them upon Christ.

The Church Jesus built rests upon Him. Those who trust in Him possess the stability pictured by Mount Zion, and those whom He saves become the people among whom God dwells. The habitation is no longer identified by physical walls but by the presence of Jesus Christ within His people.

This does not make the Old Testament references unimportant. It shows why they are important. They were preparing the language through which the New Testament would reveal the Church.

From Zion the Picture to Zion the Reality

The Old Testament therefore gives us the essential elements that must be carried forward. Zion belongs to God, God establishes Zion, God dwells in Zion, people are identified with Zion, and Jesus Christ is the foundation laid in Zion.

When the New Testament later says *"ye are come unto mount Sion,"* it is drawing upon all of this earlier imagery. The believers had not travelled physically to another mountain. They had entered the spiritual reality towards which the Old Testament Zion had been pointing.

The physical Zion prepared the picture, and Jesus Christ reveals the reality. As we continue, the next question becomes especially important:

What does Scripture mean when it says that God chose Zion for His habitation?

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the old picture of Zion point toward its fuller reality in Christ?

Personal Reflection

What earthly expectation about Zion has influenced the way you read the Old Testament?

Action Step

Compare Zion's old picture with Christ its fulfilment. What belief of yours needs correcting?

ZION IS GOD'S CHOSEN HABITATION

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One of the strongest themes connected with Zion is habitation. The Old Testament repeatedly presents Zion as the place God chose for His dwelling, but the New Testament reveals that God's final dwelling place is not a mountain, city or temple made with hands. His habitation is His born-again people.

The Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 132:13-14**:

> *"For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it."*

God chose Zion and said, *"here will I dwell."* The physical Zion provided the picture, but the purpose of God reached beyond a geographical location. The New Covenant reveals the spiritual habitation towards which the picture pointed.

God Desired a Dwelling Place

The language of Psalm 132 is personal. God did not simply choose Zion as an important location. He *"desired it for his habitation."*

A habitation is a dwelling place, so the central truth is not the mountain itself but the presence of God among His people. Throughout the Old Testament, God's presence was associated with particular physical places. The Tabernacle and later the Temple provided visible expressions of His dwelling among Israel, yet those structures could never contain the fulness of the living God.

Solomon recognised this when the Temple was dedicated. Solomon said in **1 Kings 8:27**:

> *"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?"*

The physical house could serve God's purpose, but Solomon understood that God could not be confined within it. The earthly habitation was pointing towards something greater.

The New Covenant Fulfilment

Paul identifies the New Covenant fulfilment of the habitation picture.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 3:16**:

> *"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"*

The physical Zion pointed towards a living habitation. God now dwells within His born-again people by His Spirit, and the earthly place provided the picture of the greater spiritual reality.

The Church is the habitation of God because Jesus Christ now dwells within His people by His Spirit. The promise of Psalm 132 therefore reaches beyond geography. God desired Zion for His habitation, and that purpose is fulfilled in the born-again people of Jesus Christ.

The detailed New Covenant picture of the Church as God's temple and habitation will become clearer as the relationship between Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem unfolds.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How is God's chosen dwelling fulfilled among His people?

Personal Reflection

Have buildings or locations influenced your view of where God truly dwells?

Action Step

If God dwells in His people, what should change in your understanding and practice of worship?

CHRIST THE FOUNDATION LAID IN ZION

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Zion is not only described as God's habitation. The prophets also connect Zion with the foundation upon which God's people would stand. Isaiah looked forward to the coming of a stone chosen and laid by God Himself.

Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 28:16**:

> *"Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste."*

The foundation laid in Zion is not ultimately a physical stone. The New Testament identifies this promised stone with Jesus Christ.

God Himself Laid the Foundation

Notice that God says, *"I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone."* The foundation of Zion was not chosen by human beings. God Himself determined what His spiritual people would be built upon.

Paul makes this principle unmistakable. Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 3:11**:

> *"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."*

There is no second spiritual foundation. The Church is not built upon a denomination, religious movement, human leader or system of doctrine created by men. Its foundation is Jesus Christ.

This connects directly with Zion. Isaiah said the foundation would be laid *"in Zion,"* and Paul identifies the only foundation as Jesus Christ. Spiritual Zion therefore cannot be separated from Him.

Peter Identifies the Stone in Zion

Peter quotes Isaiah and applies the prophecy directly to Jesus Christ and to those who come to Him.

Peter wrote in **1 Peter 2:4-6**:

> *"To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded."*

Peter leaves no doubt about the meaning of Isaiah's prophecy. The stone laid in Sion is Jesus Christ. He is *"chosen of God, and precious,"* and those who come to Him become *"lively stones"* built together into *"a spiritual house."*

The picture has moved beyond a physical mountain or earthly building. Zion now contains living stones because the spiritual house consists of people.

A Living Stone and Living People

Peter's language is important. Jesus is called *"a living stone,"* and believers are called *"lively stones."* The spiritual building is alive.

This is not a structure made from natural stone. It is the body of Christ, made up of people who have received spiritual life through the new birth. The Church does not become alive because its members copy Jesus from the outside. Jesus Christ is the living foundation, and His own life dwells within those who belong to Him.

The building lives because Christ lives within His people.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the living Stone and living stones belong together?

Personal Reflection

Do you see fellow believers as living stones joined to Christ, or mainly as individuals attending meetings?

Action Step

Identify a believer you have overlooked. How should Christ's life within shape your response?

The Corner Stone Determines the Building

Isaiah describes Christ not only as a foundation stone but as *"a precious corner stone."* In ancient construction, the corner stone determined the position and alignment of the building.

The spiritual meaning is clear. Jesus Christ determines the direction, truth and character of His Church. The Church does not determine who Jesus is; Jesus determines what the Church is.

Every teaching must align with Him, every claim concerning the Church must be measured against His Word, and every spiritual identity must remain centred upon Him. If a religious system moves away from Jesus Christ as the foundation, retaining a Christian name cannot correct that departure.

The building must remain aligned with the Stone.

The Foundation Is Sure

Isaiah also calls Christ *"a sure foundation."* Human institutions change, religious movements rise and disappear, and leaders come and go. Yet Jesus Christ remains unchanged.

The security of Zion therefore does not rest upon the continued existence of any earthly organisation. It rests upon the foundation God Himself laid. This helps explain the language of the Psalms concerning Zion.

The Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 125:1**:

> *"They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever."*

The permanence of spiritual Zion comes from the permanence of its foundation. Jesus Christ cannot be removed.

Faith in Christ Brings Us to the Foundation

Isaiah connects the stone with faith: *"he that believeth shall not make haste."* Peter expresses the same truth when he says, *"he that believeth on him shall not be confounded."*

Entrance into Zion therefore does not depend upon physical descent, nationality or residence in an earthly city. The promise centres upon faith in Jesus Christ. Those who come to Him become part of the spiritual house.

Peter wrote, *"To whom coming."* The movement is towards Christ. A person does not become part of God's spiritual Zion by travelling to Jerusalem. A person comes to Zion by coming to Jesus Christ through the new birth.

Zion Is Built Upon Jesus Christ

The connection is now clear. Isaiah saw a foundation laid in Zion, Peter identified that foundation as Jesus Christ, and Peter then described those who come to Him as living stones built into a spiritual house.

The language of Zion, foundation, corner stone and spiritual house all belongs together. Zion is not finally a mountain made sacred by geography. It is the spiritual people of God established upon Jesus Christ.

The physical picture prepared the way for the spiritual reality in Christ and His Church. God said, *"I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone."* Paul said, *"Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."* Peter said that those who come to Him are built up *"a spiritual house."*

Jesus Christ is therefore both the foundation of Zion and the life of the people who are built upon Him.

Zion stands because Jesus Christ is its sure foundation.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must Zion be built upon Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection

Have you depended upon an earthly centre or institution as the foundation of God's people?

Action Step

Compare your view of Zion with **Isaiah 28:16***. What change will put Christ first in your trust?*

YE ARE COME UNTO MOUNT SION

BACK TO CONTENTS

The Old Testament prepared the picture of Zion as God's habitation, His people and the place where the promised foundation would be laid. The New Testament then makes a remarkable declaration: believers have already come to Mount Sion.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 12:22-23**:

> *"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,"*

These verses bring together the truths we have been tracing. Mount Sion is identified with the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and the Church of the firstborn. The language is spiritual, and the statement is present: *"Ye are come."*

The Believers Had Already Come

The wording of Hebrews is important. The writer does not say, *"Ye shall come unto Mount Sion,"* nor does he describe Zion as something reserved for a future age. He says, *"Ye are come unto mount Sion."*

The believers addressed in Hebrews were already participating in the reality represented by Zion. They had not travelled to another physical mountain. Through Jesus Christ, they had entered the spiritual community of God's people.

This rules out the idea that the final fulfilment of Zion still awaits a future earthly city or political kingdom. New Covenant believers had already come.

Mount Sion Is the City of the Living God

Hebrews does not leave Mount Sion undefined. The verse continues, *"and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem."*

Mount Sion and the heavenly Jerusalem are placed together within the same description. The writer is not directing believers towards natural Jerusalem in Palestine. He identifies the city as heavenly.

This agrees with the spiritual direction of the New Covenant. God's people are no longer defined by an earthly location. Their identity is in Jesus Christ, and the city belongs to the living God because He dwells within His people.

Zion is therefore a living city because it is made up of living people.

The City Is the Church of the Firstborn

These verses then become even more definite. The writer says believers have come *"To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven."*

The city is not simply associated with the Church. The language brings Mount Sion, the heavenly Jerusalem and the Church of the firstborn together in one spiritual picture. Zion is therefore not finally about geography. It is about God's people.

The Church Jesus built is the spiritual Mount Sion. It is the city of the living God because the living God dwells within those who have been born again.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Hebrews connect Mount Sion with the Church of the firstborn?

Personal Reflection

What have you thought it means to belong to the city of the living God?

Action Step

Read **Hebrews 12:22–23**. *What belief needs correcting, and how will it affect your fellowship?*

Written in Heaven

Hebrews also describes the members of this Church as those *"which are written in heaven."* This again moves the identity of God's people away from earthly membership records.

The spiritual Church is not defined by a human register, denominational roll or institutional list. The Lord knows those who are His. A person's spiritual membership is determined by belonging to Jesus Christ through the new birth.

Human organisations may keep records for practical purposes, but those records do not create membership in the heavenly Jerusalem. The true citizenship of Zion comes from God.

Zion Is Entered Through the New Birth

If Mount Sion is the heavenly Jerusalem and the Church of the firstborn, then coming to Zion is inseparable from becoming part of Christ's body. A person does not enter spiritual Zion by natural birth, nationality or by travelling to an earthly Jerusalem. Entrance is spiritual.

Jesus said in **John 3:5-7**:

> *"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."*

The person who is born again receives spiritual life in Jesus Christ. By the one Spirit, that believer is brought into the one body. That is how a person comes to Zion.

The Heavenly Jerusalem Is Present

The word *"heavenly"* must not cause us to move the fulfilment into the future. Hebrews calls Jerusalem heavenly while at the same time saying, *"ye are come."* Heavenly describes its spiritual origin and nature.

The heavenly Jerusalem is from God. It is not produced by earthly government, human organisation or natural descent. It belongs to the spiritual order established through Jesus Christ.

This same principle will become important when we examine the New Jerusalem coming *"down from God out of heaven"* in Revelation. Something can be heavenly in origin while present among God's people now.

Christ Is Present in the Midst of Zion

The spiritual character of Zion also agrees with the truth that Jesus Christ dwells within His Church. The Church is not simply a collection of people who believe similar doctrines. It is a living body because Jesus Christ is present within His people by His Spirit.

This is what makes Zion the city of the living God. The city lives because God lives within His people, the habitation is spiritual because His presence is spiritual, and the unity is living because Jesus Christ Himself is the life of the body.

We Do Not Wait to Come to Zion

The words of Hebrews remove Zion from the realm of future expectation. Born-again believers do not wait for a future physical return of Jesus Christ to establish Zion on earth. Christ came to His people as the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in A.D. 31, and the Church was revealed as His spiritual habitation.

Those who are born again now enter that same spiritual reality. They come to Mount Sion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and the Church of the firstborn. These are not several different destinations, but different biblical descriptions of the one people of God in Jesus Christ.

Ye Are Come

Hebrews therefore provides one of the strongest New Testament keys for understanding Zion. The Old Testament said that God had chosen Zion for His habitation, Isaiah said that the foundation would be laid in Zion, and the New Testament identifies that foundation as Jesus Christ.

Hebrews then says to born-again believers, *"Ye are come unto mount Sion."* The fulfilment is not waiting in the future. The believer who has come to Jesus Christ has come to Zion.

Mount Sion is the present spiritual city of the living God: the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church of the firstborn.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does 'ye are come' describe a present reality?

Personal Reflection

Have you postponed the believer's entrance into Zion to a future time?

Action Step

What expectation must change when the Bible says believers 'are come' to Zion now?

THE CITY OF THE LIVING GOD, THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM

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Hebrews does more than say that believers have come to Mount Sion. It immediately gives another description of that same spiritual reality: *"the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem."*

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 12:22-23**:

> *"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,"*

Mount Sion is therefore brought together with the heavenly Jerusalem. It is the city belonging to the living God, and these verses connect that city directly with the Church of the firstborn.

The City Belongs to the Living God

The expression *"the city of the living God"* tells us whose city this is. It belongs to God, and its identity does not come from earthly geography, government, buildings or institutions.

The people who belong to this city have been made spiritually alive through Jesus Christ. They are not joined together simply because they occupy the same location or belong to the same earthly organisation. They belong together because they belong to the living God.

The Jerusalem That Is Above

Paul uses similar language when he distinguishes between earthly Jerusalem and the Jerusalem that is above.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 4:25-26**:

> *"For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."*

Paul does not direct believers back to earthly Jerusalem as the centre of their New Covenant identity. He contrasts *"Jerusalem which now is"* with *"Jerusalem which is above."* The Jerusalem that is above belongs to the spiritual order established in Jesus Christ.

This agrees with Hebrews calling it *"the heavenly Jerusalem."* The New Covenant city is not defined by earthly geography but by its heavenly origin and spiritual nature.

Heavenly Does Not Mean Future

The word heavenly must be understood carefully. It does not mean that the city exists only in a distant future or that believers must wait until the end of their earthly lives before entering it.

Hebrews says *"Ye are come."* The city is heavenly in origin and nature, yet the believers addressed in Hebrews had already come to it.

The heavenly Jerusalem comes from God. It is not produced by earthly politics, human religion or natural ancestry. A heavenly reality can therefore be present among God's people now.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does 'heavenly' not mean the city must be future?

Personal Reflection

Has the word 'heavenly' made you think the Church's true city cannot be present today?

Action Step

How does Hebrews 12 correct your view of the heavenly city and your belonging to it now?

The City Is a Spiritual People

The language of a city helps us understand the collective nature of the Church. A city is made up of many people living together under a shared order. In the same way, the heavenly Jerusalem represents the collective people of God.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:19**:

> *"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;"*

The word *"fellowcitizens"* fits naturally with the picture of a spiritual city. Born-again believers possess a shared spiritual citizenship in Jesus Christ. They may live in different earthly nations, speak different languages and gather in different places, yet spiritually they belong to the same city.

Their citizenship is determined by Christ.

The City and the Church Are Connected

Hebrews places the heavenly Jerusalem directly alongside *"the general assembly and church of the firstborn."* These verses bring the city and the Church together within the same description of the people of God.

The heavenly Jerusalem is therefore not a separate spiritual destination standing apart from the Church. The Church is the body of Christ, while the heavenly Jerusalem is the city of the living God. These are different biblical pictures describing the same born-again people from different perspectives.

As a body, believers are joined to Christ the Head. As a temple, they are God's habitation. As Zion, they are the people established upon Christ, and as the heavenly Jerusalem, they are the city of the living God.

The City Is Not Defined by Earthly Borders

Because the heavenly Jerusalem is spiritual, it cannot be confined within physical borders. No earthly nation contains the whole city of God, no physical Jerusalem can become the boundary of the Church, and no religious organisation can claim that its earthly structure is identical with the heavenly city.

The city consists of those who belong to Jesus Christ.

Jesus made the spiritual nature of His kingdom clear.

Jesus said in **John 18:36**:

> *"Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence."*

The heavenly Jerusalem belongs to this same spiritual order. The Church is present on earth, but its source, life and authority are from God. Believers can therefore belong to the heavenly city while living physically in many different places.

Jesus Christ Is the Life of the City

The city is called the city of the living God because God is present within His people. Jesus Christ dwells within every born-again believer by His Spirit.

The city is not living because of its buildings, organisation or history. It lives because Christ lives within His people. The same truth that defines the Church also defines the heavenly Jerusalem.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:27**:

> *"To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"*

The mystery is *"Christ in you."* The heavenly Jerusalem is a living city because the living Christ dwells within its people.

The Believer Belongs to the Heavenly City Now

Hebrews leaves us with a present spiritual reality. The believer who has come to Jesus Christ has come to Mount Sion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and the Church of the firstborn.

These are not different spiritual destinations. They are different biblical descriptions of the same people of God. The language changes, but the spiritual people remain the same.

The city does not await a future geographical fulfilment. Its origin is heavenly, its foundation is Jesus Christ, its citizens are born again, and its life is the indwelling Christ.

The heavenly Jerusalem is the present city of the living God, made up of those who belong to Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does a believer belong to the heavenly city now?

Personal Reflection

How does belonging to God's city now challenge the way you treat His people on earth?

Action Step

Choose a believer you know. How should Christ's life within you change the way you care?

THE NEW JERUSALEM CAME DOWN FROM GOD

BACK TO CONTENTS

The book of Revelation gives another picture of the same spiritual city described in Hebrews as *"the heavenly Jerusalem."* John sees a holy city called the New Jerusalem and tells us clearly where it comes from.

John wrote in **Revelation 21:2**:

> *"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."*

The wording is important. The New Jerusalem did not simply come out of heaven. John says that it came *"from God out of heaven."* Heaven describes its heavenly origin, but God Himself is its source.

From God Out of Heaven

John's wording takes us deeper than saying that God simply created the Church at a particular moment in history. Scripture reveals that the Church was within God's eternal purpose before it was manifested in the Gospel Day.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 3:9-11**:

> *"And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:"*

Paul speaks of a mystery *"hid in God"* and connects its revelation with *"the church"* and with God's *"eternal purpose."* The Church was therefore not an afterthought produced by human religion. What had been hidden in God was brought forth and revealed according to His eternal purpose.

The physical picture of Adam and Eve helps us understand this spiritual truth.

Moses wrote in **Genesis 2:21-23**:

> *"And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."*

Eve did not first exist independently of Adam and later become joined to him. She was in Adam before she was brought forth from him. Adam could therefore say that she was *"bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh"* because she had been taken out of him.

Paul tells us that this relationship points beyond Adam and Eve.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 5:30-32**:

> *"For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."*

Paul identifies the deeper mystery as *"Christ and the church."* Eve coming forth from Adam provides the physical picture, while Christ and His Church reveal the spiritual reality.

In the same way that Eve was in Adam before she was manifested, the Church was in God before it was manifested. It existed within His eternal purpose and was brought forth from Him in the Gospel Day. The Church did not originate in human religion, human organisation or human decision.

It came forth from God.

The one God was fully revealed in Jesus Christ. Therefore, when Revelation says that the New Jerusalem came *"from God out of heaven,"* it reveals that God Himself is the source of the Church. The Church came forth from the God who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.

This is why Jesus could say, *"I will build my church."* It belongs to Him because its source, life and identity are found in Him. As Eve came forth from Adam, the Church came forth from God, and what had been hidden in God was revealed among men.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What does it mean that the New Jerusalem came down from God?

Personal Reflection

Have you thought of the New Jerusalem as the work of people rather than coming from God?

Action Step

Have you credited people with what came from God? Explain the change needed in your trust.

A Heavenly City Revealed Among God's People

The words *"coming down from God out of heaven"* must be understood according to the spiritual language of Revelation. John is recording a vision filled with symbols through which spiritual realities are revealed.

The New Jerusalem is therefore not a gigantic physical structure travelling through the natural sky. Hebrews has already told born-again believers that they had come to the heavenly Jerusalem.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 12:22-23**:

> *"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,"*

The heavenly city was already a present spiritual reality for New Covenant believers. Revelation describes that same reality from another perspective. The city comes from God because God is its source, and it comes out of heaven because its origin and nature are heavenly rather than earthly.

The City Is Identified for John

Revelation does not leave us to guess what the holy city represents. Later in the same chapter, one of the angels tells John what he is about to see.

John wrote in **Revelation 21:9-11**:

> *"And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;"*

The angel says, *"I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife."* What does John then see? He sees *"that great city, the holy Jerusalem."*

The vision itself therefore identifies the city with people. The New Jerusalem cannot be reduced to literal architecture because John is shown a spiritual people under the symbol of a city. The fuller meaning of *"the bride, the Lamb's wife"* will be examined separately, but Revelation 21 already gives us the essential identification: the holy city represents the Church.

A City Can Represent a People

Jesus Himself used the imagery of a city when speaking to His disciples.

Jesus said in **Matthew 5:14-16**:

> *"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."*

Jesus said to His people, *"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid."* A city can therefore provide a biblical picture of a collective people.

The New Jerusalem is the holy city belonging to God. It represents the collective body of those who have been born again and belong to Jesus Christ.

The New Jerusalem and Pentecost

What had been hidden within God's eternal purpose was revealed in the Gospel Day. At Pentecost in A.D. 31, Jesus Christ came to dwell within His people as the Holy Spirit, and the Church was revealed as His spiritual body and habitation.

Jesus had promised His disciples in **John 14:18**:

> *"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."*

The Person came. Jesus Christ came as the Holy Spirit to dwell within His people. The Church was not created by men gathering together and forming an organisation. God brought forth and revealed what had been within His eternal purpose.

The heavenly Jerusalem came from God and was manifested among men. This is the spiritual significance of Pentecost in relation to the New Jerusalem: what had been hidden was now revealed, and what had been in God was brought forth from God.

Heavenly Origin Does Not Mean Future Arrival

Because Revelation says that the New Jerusalem comes out of heaven, some may assume that the city must still be waiting for a future descent. Hebrews prevents us from making that interpretation.

Hebrews says *"Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem."* The believers had already come to the heavenly city.

Something can therefore be heavenly in origin while being spiritually present among God's people now. The word heavenly tells us where the city comes from and what kind of city it is. It does not force its fulfilment into a future age.

The city comes from God. Its life comes from God, its people receive their spiritual life from God, and its authority comes from God. Nothing about the New Jerusalem originates in earthly political power, natural ancestry or human religious organisation.

The City Has the Glory of God

John says that the holy Jerusalem was *"having the glory of God."* This glory is not the glory of impressive architecture or earthly wealth. It is the presence of God within His people.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:26-27**:

> *"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"*

Again, Paul speaks of something that had been *"hid"* and was now *"made manifest."* The mystery is *"Christ in you."*

This is the glory of the New Jerusalem. The city has the glory of God because Jesus Christ dwells within His born-again people by His Spirit. Its glory does not come from gold, precious stones or physical beauty. Revelation uses those images to describe the spiritual splendour of what God has brought forth.

The true glory is the indwelling Christ.

The New Jerusalem Is a Present Spiritual Reality

When these Scriptures are allowed to interpret one another, the picture becomes clear. Paul speaks of *"Jerusalem which is above,"* Hebrews speaks of *"the heavenly Jerusalem,"* and John sees *"new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven."*

Hebrews identifies the heavenly city with Mount Sion and the Church of the firstborn. Revelation identifies the holy city with the bride. Paul describes the mystery as something once hidden but now made manifest.

These are not separate spiritual realities. They describe the one Church of Jesus Christ.

The New Jerusalem is therefore not a future architectural city waiting to descend from outer space. It is the present spiritual city of God. It was in God before it was manifested, it came forth from God, and its origin is heavenly.

Its foundation is Jesus Christ, its citizens are born again, its glory is Christ within, and its life comes from the God who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.

The New Jerusalem came from God out of heaven, and what had been hidden in God was revealed among men as the living Church of Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is the New Jerusalem a present spiritual reality?

Personal Reflection

Has a future physical picture of Jerusalem overshadowed its present spiritual meaning?

Action Step

Compare Revelation 21 with Hebrews 12. Which expectation about the New Jerusalem must change?

THE CHURCH IS THE TEMPLE AND HABITATION OF GOD

BACK TO CONTENTS

The New Jerusalem came from God and was revealed as His spiritual people. Scripture now gives us another picture that helps explain why this city is called *"the city of the living God."* The Church is the temple and habitation in whom God Himself dwells.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 3:16**:

> *"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"*

The New Covenant temple is therefore not primarily a physical building. It is a living people in whom God dwells by His Spirit.

The Temple Has Moved From Stone to People

Under the Old Covenant, the Tabernacle and later the Temple provided visible places associated with the presence and worship of God. Those structures served God's purpose, but they were never His final habitation.

Even Solomon understood that no earthly building could contain God.

Solomon said in **1 Kings 8:27**:

> *"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?"*

The physical Temple was real and important, but it pointed beyond itself. The New Covenant reveals the greater reality: God dwells within His people. Paul does not say that believers simply attend the temple; he says, *"ye are the temple of God."*

Built Together for an Habitation of God

Paul develops this spiritual building imagery in his letter to the Ephesians.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:19-22**:

> *"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."*

Several pictures come together in these verses. Believers are fellowcitizens, members of God's household and part of a spiritual building. Together they form a holy temple, and Paul describes them as *"an habitation of God through the Spirit."*

This is the New Covenant fulfilment of God's desire to dwell in Zion. The habitation is no longer identified by walls, stones or geographical boundaries. It consists of born-again people in whom God dwells.

Living Stones in a Spiritual House

Peter uses the same imagery.

Peter wrote in **1 Peter 2:4-5**:

> *"To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."*

Jesus Christ is the living Stone, and those who come to Him become *"lively stones."* The house is alive because the people who compose it have received spiritual life in Him.

This spiritual house does not exist independently of Christ. Its foundation is Christ, its life is Christ, and its members live because Christ dwells within them. The Church is therefore His living body and habitation, not a dead structure surrounding Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do living stones form God's spiritual house?

Personal Reflection

Have you treated a church building as more important than the believers who are God's living temple?

Action Step

Do you value God's living temple above buildings? Explain how your care for believers will change.

God Dwells in His People

Paul makes the indwelling reality even clearer.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 6:16**:

> *"And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."*

The words *"I will dwell in them"* are especially important. The movement is from God dwelling among His people through an earthly sanctuary to God dwelling in His people.

This is why the Church is the temple of the living God. The living God is not represented only by outward symbols. He personally dwells within His people.

The Spirit of God Is the Spirit of Christ

The One dwelling within the believer is Jesus Christ by His Spirit.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

Paul speaks of *"the Spirit of God"* and *"the Spirit of Christ"* within the same verse. The Spirit dwelling within God's temple is the Spirit of Christ.

The Church is therefore not God's habitation because believers gather around the memory of an absent Christ. Jesus Christ is personally present within His born-again people by His Spirit, and His life is within them.

The Glory of the Temple Is Christ Within

This also helps us understand why John describes the New Jerusalem as *"having the glory of God."* The glory of God's New Covenant habitation is not natural gold, stone, architecture or ceremonial splendour. The glory is Christ within His people.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:26-27**:

> *"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"*

The mystery is *"Christ in you."* This is the glory of the spiritual temple. The same Church that Revelation describes as the New Jerusalem is the people in whom Jesus Christ dwells.

A Building Is Not the Church

This truth also helps us use the word church correctly. A building in which believers meet may be useful, but the physical structure is not the spiritual Church.

Believers can gather in a house, hall, rented room or another suitable place without changing the identity of the Church. The people are the temple.

God does not dwell within His people because they enter a specially consecrated building. He dwells within them because they have been born again and have received the Spirit of Christ. The holiness of the Church therefore comes from the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ, not from bricks, timber, stone or religious architecture.

The City, Temple and Habitation Are One People

Scripture gives several pictures of the same spiritual people. As Zion, the Church is God's chosen habitation. As the heavenly Jerusalem, it is the city of the living God, and as the New Jerusalem, it is the city that came from God out of heaven.

As the temple, it is the people in whom God dwells. As the body, it is joined to Jesus Christ as its Head. These pictures do not describe different peoples or different stages of salvation. They reveal different aspects of the same Church of Jesus Christ.

The New Jerusalem is therefore a living city because its people are the living temple of God. God said of Zion, *"here will I dwell,"* while Paul says of the Church, *"I will dwell in them."* The picture and the fulfilment belong together.

The Church is the temple and habitation of God because Jesus Christ dwells within His born-again people by His Spirit.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do city, temple and habitation describe the same people?

Personal Reflection

Which picture—city, temple or habitation—most challenges an earthly view you have held?

Action Step

Which picture of God's dwelling corrects your thinking, and what will you now understand?

JERUSALEM WHICH IS ABOVE IS FREE

BACK TO CONTENTS

Paul's letter to the Galatians gives another important key to understanding the heavenly Jerusalem. He distinguishes between the earthly Jerusalem connected with the Old Covenant and another Jerusalem which he describes as *"above."*

Paul wrote in **Galatians 4:22-26**:

> *"For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."*

Paul tells us plainly that he is using an allegory. The physical people and relationships provide a picture through which the two covenants and their spiritual realities can be understood.

Jerusalem Which Now Is

Paul first speaks of *"Jerusalem which now is."* This was the earthly Jerusalem associated with the Old Covenant order. He connects that Jerusalem with Mount Sinai and with bondage.

The point is not that the physical city itself was sinful, but that the covenant system centred upon outward requirements could not give the spiritual freedom found in Jesus Christ. The Old Covenant had served God's purpose, but its shadows pointed towards something greater. The New Covenant reality is found in Christ.

Jerusalem Which Is Above

Paul then makes the contrast: *"But Jerusalem which is above is free."* This Jerusalem belongs to another order. It is not defined by earthly geography, natural ancestry or an earthly Temple.

It is the heavenly Jerusalem, which agrees directly with the language of Hebrews.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 12:22-23**:

> *"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,"*

Paul's *"Jerusalem which is above"* and Hebrews' *"heavenly Jerusalem"* describe the same spiritual city. That city is the Church of God.

The Heavenly Jerusalem Is Free

Paul says that Jerusalem above *"is free."* Freedom is one of the defining realities of the New Covenant.

Jesus said in **John 8:34-36**:

> *"Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."*

The freedom of the heavenly Jerusalem is found in Jesus Christ. It is freedom from the bondage of sin and from dependence upon an outward covenant system for spiritual life. The believer does not become part of God's people through natural birth, circumcision, Temple worship or another outward covenant mark.

The believer is born again through Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What freedom belongs to the Jerusalem above?

Personal Reflection

Have you connected freedom in Christ with belonging to the Jerusalem above, or with an outward religious structure?

Action Step

Use **Galatians 4:26** *to examine reliance on outward requirements. How does Christ's freedom change it?*

"The Mother of Us All"

Paul then makes a striking statement: *"Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."* The motherhood language belongs to the same spiritual imagery we have already been studying.

The heavenly Jerusalem is not simply a place where God's people live. Paul describes it as *"the mother of us all."* This does not mean that an earthly religious organisation possesses the power to give spiritual life, because the new birth remains the work of God through His Spirit.

Jesus said in **John 3:5-7**:

> *"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."*

God gives the spiritual birth. Yet those who are born again are not born into spiritual isolation. They become part of the one body, one household and one heavenly city that belongs to Jesus Christ.

In this Scriptural picture, Jerusalem above is the spiritual mother of God's children.

The City and the Family Are One People

The Bible uses different pictures to reveal different aspects of the same Church. As a body, believers are joined to Jesus Christ as their Head. As a temple, they are the habitation of God through the Spirit.

As Zion, they are God's established people built upon Jesus Christ. As the New Jerusalem, they are the city that came from God out of heaven. As Jerusalem which is above, they are described as the spiritual family to which God's born-again children belong.

These are not different Churches. They are different pictures of the one people who came from God and belong to Jesus Christ.

The Family Is Present Now

Paul does not speak of Jerusalem above as though it will become the mother of God's people at some future time. He says, *"Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."* The statement is present.

Hebrews likewise says that believers *"are come"* to the heavenly Jerusalem. The spiritual family of God therefore exists now, and those who have been born again belong to that family now.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:19**:

> *"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;"*

Born-again believers are already members of God's household and citizens of His heavenly city.

The Jerusalem Above Came From God

This also connects with what John saw in Revelation. The New Jerusalem came *"from God out of heaven."* Its source was God Himself. What had been hidden in God's eternal purpose was brought forth and revealed in the Gospel Day.

The Jerusalem above is therefore not a human religious system that later claimed a heavenly identity. It came from God. Its freedom is in Jesus Christ, its life is from Jesus Christ, and its people are born again through Jesus Christ.

Paul declares that this heavenly Jerusalem is *"the mother of us all."*

The next question follows naturally: if Jerusalem above is our spiritual mother, what does Scripture mean when it says of Zion, *"This and that man was born in her"*?

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does the Jerusalem above come from God rather than human effort?

Personal Reflection

Do you see the Church as receiving life from God or as producing that life through its own activity?

Action Step

What human effort have you trusted for spiritual life? Explain how your trust should return to Christ.

BORN IN ZION AND WRITTEN AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE

BACK TO CONTENTS

The language of Jerusalem as *"the mother of us all"* leads naturally to another Old Testament picture. Psalm 87 speaks of people being born in Zion and of the LORD recording those who belong there.

The Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 87:5-6**:

> *"And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her. The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there. Selah."*

These words bring together three important truths. People are described as being born in Zion, God Himself establishes Zion, and the LORD records those who belong among His people.

"This and That Man Was Born in Her"

The language is striking. Zion is pictured not simply as a place people visit, but as a place in which people are born.

This connects naturally with Paul's statement concerning the heavenly Jerusalem. Paul wrote in **Galatians 4:26**:

> *"But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."*

Psalm 87 speaks of people being born in Zion, while Galatians speaks of Jerusalem above as *"the mother of us all."* Hebrews then identifies Mount Sion with *"the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem"* and with *"the church of the firstborn."*

The pictures belong together. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem and the Church describe the spiritual people to whom the born-again believer belongs.

God Gives the Birth

The language of being born in Zion must not be misunderstood. Zion does not independently produce spiritual life, nor does an earthly congregation have power to make someone born again. The new birth is God's work.

Jesus said in **John 3:5-7**:

> *"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."*

A person is born *"of the Spirit."* God gives spiritual life. Psalm 87 therefore gives us the family and city picture of that spiritual birth.

The person whom God makes alive belongs in Zion. The born-again believer belongs to the heavenly Jerusalem and to the Church of the firstborn. God gives the birth, and the person born of the Spirit belongs among God's people.

The Highest Himself Shall Establish Her

Psalm 87 also says, *"the highest himself shall establish her."* Zion is not established by human effort.

This agrees with everything we have already seen concerning the Church. Jesus said, *"I will build my church."* The Lord adds the saved, and the New Jerusalem came *"from God out of heaven."*

The same God who gives spiritual life establishes the spiritual people to whom the believer belongs. Zion therefore cannot be the product of denominational organisation, human government or religious tradition.

"The highest himself shall establish her."

Personal Response

Key Truth

What does it mean that the Highest Himself establishes Zion?

Personal Reflection

What concern about God's people becomes different when you trust that He Himself establishes Zion?

Action Step

Consider Psalm 87 and a concern about God's people. What should change in your trust?

The LORD Writes Up the People

The Psalm continues, *"The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there."* The picture is of God Himself recording those who belong to Zion.

This agrees closely with Hebrews.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 12:22-23**:

> *"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,"*

The members of the Church of the firstborn are described as *"written in heaven."* Psalm says that the LORD writes up the people of Zion, while Hebrews says that the Church of the firstborn is written in heaven.

The picture and the fulfilment agree.

Written in Heaven, Not on an Earthly Roll

This spiritual record is very different from an earthly membership roll. A congregation may keep names for practical administration, but a human record cannot determine whether someone belongs to Zion. A person's name may appear on an earthly list without that person ever having been born again.

Likewise, a genuine believer may belong to Jesus Christ even though no religious organisation has placed that person's name on its membership roll. The determining record belongs to God.

Jesus said in **Luke 10:20**:

> *"Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven."*

The believer's greatest security is not that an earthly organisation recognises them. It is that they belong to Jesus Christ, and their names are written in heaven.

Born Again and Brought Into Zion

The new birth and entrance into Zion therefore belong together. When God gives spiritual life, the believer does not remain outside His people. By the one Spirit, the believer is brought into the one body of Christ and belongs to the heavenly Jerusalem.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

> *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*

The Spirit gives life and brings the believer into the one body. This is the New Covenant reality pictured by being born in Zion.

The believer is born of the Spirit and belongs to the city of the living God.

Zion Is a People Who Have Received Life From God

Psalm 87 therefore adds another important dimension to our understanding of Zion. Zion is God's habitation, established by God, built upon Jesus Christ and identified with the heavenly Jerusalem. It is populated by people who have received spiritual life from God.

The city is alive because its people have been born again. The record is heavenly because God Himself knows those who belong to Him.

The Psalmist said, *"This and that man was born in her."* Hebrews says that those who have come to Mount Sion belong to *"the church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven."*

The picture and the fulfilment agree.

Those whom God brings to spiritual birth belong to Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, and their true membership is written in heaven by God Himself.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How are those born in Zion counted among God's people?

Personal Reflection

Have you relied upon an earthly membership record as proof of belonging to God's spiritual family?

Action Step

Compare Psalm 87 with the new birth. How should you now recognise people who belong to Christ?

THE NEW JERUSALEM IS NOT A FUTURE LITERAL CITY

BACK TO CONTENTS

Having traced Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem through Scripture, the conclusion is clear. The New Jerusalem is not a future physical city that believers are waiting to descend from the sky. It is the present spiritual Church of God.

John wrote in **Revelation 21:2**:

> *"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."*

The language belongs to a vision. The city comes from God, its origin is heavenly, and Revelation later identifies it with the bride. Scripture therefore directs us towards a spiritual people rather than a future architectural structure.

Hebrews Identifies the City

The strongest safeguard against making the New Jerusalem a future literal city is the plain language of Hebrews.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 12:22-23**:

> *"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,"*

The believers had already come to the heavenly Jerusalem. Hebrews does not say that they would come to it after a future physical descent. It says, *"ye are come."*

These verses also connect the heavenly Jerusalem with *"the general assembly and church of the firstborn."* The city was therefore already a present spiritual reality within the New Covenant.

Revelation Identifies the City With People

Revelation itself confirms that the holy city represents people.

John wrote in **Revelation 21:9-10**:

> *"And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,"*

The angel tells John, *"I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife."* John is then shown *"that great city, the holy Jerusalem."* The vision itself therefore connects the city with people.

The fuller teaching concerning the Lamb's wife belongs to another part of this module, but the identification here is already clear. The New Jerusalem cannot be reduced to literal walls, streets and buildings when John is shown the bride under the symbol of a city.

The City Is Heavenly, Not Future

The word heavenly does not mean future. Hebrews calls Jerusalem *"heavenly"* while also saying that believers had already come to it. Its heavenly character describes its source and spiritual nature.

Paul makes the same distinction.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 4:25-26**:

> *"For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."*

Paul distinguishes earthly Jerusalem from *"Jerusalem which is above."* Jerusalem above was already the spiritual reality to which believers belonged. He did not direct them towards a future earthly Jerusalem as the centre of New Covenant life.

The New Jerusalem is from above because it came from God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does the heavenly city not require a future physical descent?

Personal Reflection

Do you still read Revelation's city as a future physical destination rather than God's present people?

Action Step

Read Hebrews 12 and Revelation 21. What future-city expectation needs correcting in your belief?

The City Came From God

John's words are precise: *"coming down from God out of heaven."* The source of the New Jerusalem is God Himself. It did not originate in human religion, earthly government or denominational organisation.

The Church was hidden within God's eternal purpose before it was manifested. In the Gospel Day, what had been hidden in God was brought forth and revealed.

This is why the picture of Eve coming forth from Adam is helpful. Eve was in Adam before she was brought forth from him, and Paul tells us that the deeper mystery concerns Christ and the Church.

The Church came forth from God and belongs to Him. This is very different from interpreting the vision as a future physical object descending through the atmosphere.

The Glory of the City Is Christ Within

A literal interpretation can draw attention towards the physical descriptions of the city: precious stones, gates, walls and streets. Yet Revelation tells us that the city has *"the glory of God."*

The true glory of God's New Covenant people is Jesus Christ dwelling within them.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:26-27**:

> *"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"*

The glory is *"Christ in you."* Revelation uses visible symbols to reveal spiritual realities. The preciousness and beauty of the city point to the glory of God's people because Jesus Christ dwells within them.

The imagery must therefore be understood spiritually.

God's Habitation Is a People

The Old Testament had already prepared us for this understanding.

The Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 132:13-14**:

> *"For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it."*

Under the New Covenant, Paul identifies that habitation.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 3:16**:

> *"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"*

God's dwelling place is His people. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem all reveal this same spiritual people from different perspectives.

The Church is the living habitation in whom Jesus Christ dwells by His Spirit.

The New Jerusalem Was Revealed in the Gospel Day

The New Jerusalem belongs to the Gospel Day, not to a future age after a physical return of Jesus Christ.

Jesus promised His disciples in **John 14:18**:

> *"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."*

Jesus fulfilled that promise at Pentecost in A.D. 31 when He came as the Holy Spirit to dwell within His people. The Church was revealed as God's spiritual habitation.

The Person had come, and the living city was revealed among men. Those who are born again now enter that same spiritual reality.

We Do Not Wait for the City

Born-again believers are not waiting to enter the New Jerusalem at some future physical event. Hebrews says that they have already come to Mount Sion, to the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem and to the Church of the firstborn.

The language is present. The reality is present. The Church is present.

The Symbol Points to the Church

The descriptions of Revelation must therefore be interpreted consistently with the clearer verses that identify the city. The New Jerusalem is not a future physical capital, a literal city descending from outer space or something separate from the Church.

It is the heavenly Jerusalem to which believers have already come. It came from God, was revealed in the Gospel Day, and consists of the born-again people in whom Jesus Christ dwells.

The holy city is not waiting to come. The New Jerusalem is the present spiritual Church of the living God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How was the New Jerusalem revealed in the Gospel Day?

Personal Reflection

How does seeing the New Jerusalem as Christ's present people change your attitude towards the Church?

Action Step

What in your attitude towards the Church needs changing because Christ lives within His people?

CONCLUSION: ZION IS THE PRESENT CITY OF GOD

BACK TO CONTENTS

This Study Guide has traced one spiritual reality through several biblical pictures. Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem are not separate destinations. Scripture brings them together to reveal the present spiritual Church of Jesus Christ.

The writer of Hebrews gives the clearest summary.

He wrote in **Hebrews 12:22-23**:

> *"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,"*

The controlling words are *"ye are come."* Born-again believers are not waiting for a future age before they can enter Zion. Through Jesus Christ, they have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem and to the Church of the firstborn.

The Old Testament Picture Has Found Its Reality

The Old Testament described Zion as God's chosen habitation.

The Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 132:13-14**:

> *"For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it."*

The New Covenant reveals the fulfilment of that promise. God's habitation is now His born-again people.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 3:16**:

> *"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"*

The physical mountain and Temple prepared the picture. Jesus Christ and His indwelling Church reveal the spiritual reality. What was shown through an earthly place is fulfilled in a living people in whom God dwells by His Spirit.

Jesus Christ Is the Foundation and Life of Zion

Isaiah foretold that God would lay a foundation in Zion, and the New Testament identifies that foundation as Jesus Christ. The Church therefore does not stand upon geography, denomination, human organisation or religious tradition. It stands upon Christ.

He is also the life within the city. The glory of the heavenly Jerusalem is not physical splendour but the presence of Jesus Christ within His people.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:27**:

> *"To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"*

The glory is Christ in you. Zion is alive because Jesus Christ dwells within His born-again people by His Spirit.

The New Jerusalem Came From God

John saw the New Jerusalem *"coming down from God out of heaven."* The city did not originate in human religion, earthly government or human organisation. God Himself was its source.

The Church was in God before it was manifested, held within His eternal purpose. In the Gospel Day, what had been hidden in God was brought forth and revealed. As Eve was in Adam before she was brought forth from him, the Church was in God before it was manifested.

Paul identifies this deeper mystery as *"Christ and the church."* The New Jerusalem therefore came from God because the Church came from God.

The City Is Present

Paul speaks of *"Jerusalem which is above."* Hebrews speaks of *"the heavenly Jerusalem."* John sees *"new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven."*

Psalm 87 speaks of those born in Zion, while Hebrews speaks of the Church of the firstborn *"which are written in heaven."* These verses use different pictures, but their testimony is consistent.

The city is spiritual and heavenly in origin. It came from God, consists of born-again people, and is the habitation in whom Jesus Christ dwells by His Spirit.

We Have Come to Zion

The believer does not need to travel to an earthly Jerusalem to enter Zion, nor does the believer wait for a future literal city to descend from the sky. The person who comes to Jesus Christ through the new birth comes to the spiritual reality represented by Zion.

The Church is God's habitation. It is the heavenly Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem. It is alive because Jesus Christ dwells within His people.

Zion is present. The heavenly Jerusalem is present. The New Jerusalem is present. These names and pictures reveal the one spiritual city of the living God: the Church of Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do these verses show that believers have come to Zion, the present city of God?

Personal Reflection

What has changed most in your understanding of Zion as God's present people?

Action Step

Choose a verse that corrected your view of Zion. How will that truth shape your fellowship?

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

How do Old Testament pictures of Zion point to God's present people in Christ? Explain why Hebrews says believers have come to Mount Sion, rather than waiting only for a future city.

2. Understanding

How are the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church of the firstborn and God's living temple connected? Use verses to explain why these are pictures of one people rather than separate places.

3. Personal Reflection

Have you thought of Zion or the New Jerusalem mainly as a future earthly place? Explain which verse has corrected or strengthened your understanding, and what you now understand differently.

4. Response to Truth

If believers already belong to God's heavenly city, what difference should that make to the way you regard His people now? Explain how you would respond to the claim that His dwelling depends on one earthly location.

5. Action Step

Choose a belief you have held about Zion or the New Jerusalem. Compare it with a Bible verse, explain what needs correcting and how this truth should affect your fellowship with God's people.

6. Early Response

Have you begun to respond to that correction in your thinking or fellowship? Explain what has changed, or why you have not yet made a response.

7. Ongoing Practice

How will you continue to read Old Testament pictures of Zion in light of their fulfilment in Christ? Describe a way to compare verses before drawing a conclusion about God's city.

8. Doctrinal Clarity

Why do 'heavenly' and 'came down from God' not require a future physical New Jerusalem? Connect Hebrews 12, the Jerusalem above and God's habitation among His people in your answer.

9. Living the Truth

When someone treats a building or earthly city as the centre of God's people, how would you explain God's living temple? Describe how this truth should affect your fellowship with believers elsewhere.

10. Final Response

Bring together Zion, the New Jerusalem, the living temple and those born among God's people. What has become clearer or changed in your understanding? Explain how belonging to God's present people should affect the way you live with them.