

THE VISION OF ZION

by Norman Holmes

As we study the Scriptures, we are increasingly attracted to the importance of the term 'Zion.' This name gains a growing prophetic significance as we go through the story of the Bible. From its original meaning as a fortress hill in Jerusalem, Zion goes onward in the Old Testament to signify the high calling of God for His people. By the end of the New Testament it reveals the center of heaven's purposes and placement. What does this all mean for us? To gain an understanding of the vision of Zion, let us start at the beginning.

ZION, THE CITY OF KING DAVID

The first time the name 'Zion' is found in the Bible is in 2 Samuel. There we read, *"And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who spoke to David, saying, 'You shall not come in here; but the blind and the lame will repel you,' thinking, 'David cannot come in here.' ...Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion (that is, the City of David). Then David dwelt in the stronghold, and called it the City of David... So David went on and became great, and the Lord God of hosts was with him,"* 2 Samuel 5:6-7 & 9-10.

When David first became the king of all Israel, he went up with his army to attack the Jebusites at Jerusalem. He wanted to establish a good capitol for his nation, so David chose this city with a strong fortress that was just 8 kilometers north of his hometown, Bethlehem. The Jebusites had built a fortress there on a hill on the southeast side of Jerusalem called Mount Zion. The hill was probably named after this fortress, as the name 'Zion' is thought by many scholars as having come either from a Semitic word for 'protect' or 'fortress,' or else from a Hebrew root which means 'to erect' or 'a structure.'

Once David captured this fortress, it became his royal capitol that he also named 'The City of David.' As he ruled from Zion, the Lord expanded David's kingdom until he ruled over a great empire from the Euphrates River to the borders of Egypt.

ZION, THE PLACE OF WORSHIP AND GLORY

As well as being the City of David where the king ruled in great authority, this hill called Mount Zion also had another great significance in David's time. Mount Zion was where David built a tabernacle and placed the Ark of the Covenant. We read, *"David built houses for himself in the City of David; and he prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched a tent for it... So they brought the ark of God, and set it in the midst of the tabernacle that David had erected for it,"* 1 Chronicles 15:1 & 16:1.

The Ark of the Covenant was where God dwelt, spoke from, and revealed His glory to His people, Ex.25:22; Ps.80:1; & Lev.16:2. King David placed the ark in a tabernacle on Mount Zion, which he made as a place of worship where God dwelt in the midst of His people, 1 Chron.16:4-37; Ps.9:11.

When the ark was placed in this tabernacle, Zion then became famous for two reasons: both the throne of the king and the ark of God were there! The throne speaks of authority, while the ark speaks of worship and God's glory. The significance of the throne and the ark in Zion continue on to have greater prophetic meaning as the Scriptures unfold.

ZION, THE 'CENTER OF THE ACTION'

In the natural, we understand that many who live in the capitol of a nation have higher social standings than those who live out in the remote countryside. This is because a capitol is not only the political center of the nation, but is often an economic, educational, and military center. Furthermore, if you live or work at the national palace, or the 'White House,' you could hold a very high position.

We find a similar spiritual parallel in the Scriptures. Psalm 76:1-2 tells us, *"In Judah God is known, His name is great in Israel. In Salem also is His tabernacle, and His dwelling place in Zion."* Here we can see a greater spiritual knowledge as we are brought into the geographical center of God's people. On the outside, among all the Israelites, God's name is great. As the focus shifts to the most important province, we find a higher level of spiritual awareness: *"in Judah God is known."* This is a higher spiritual level, as there are many people who know that God's name is great, yet they do not personally know the Lord. Then as we narrow down the search to examine the center of the nation, we come to the capitol. Here in Jerusalem we find a much higher spiritual experience, for Jerusalem has God's tabernacle, and on Mount Zion in particular is God's dwelling place.

All the Israelites were God's people, who could prepare for an eternal reward in heaven. Some were offered higher callings than others, such as the tribe of Judah that gained the kingship. Yet the people who lived on Zion were in the very center of the action, because the throne of David and the worship at the ark were there.

Accordingly, Zion became synonymous with the high calling of God that was available to God's people in the Old Testament. Those born in Zion were given high honor, Ps.87:1-6. Mount Zion was a place of joy and safety, the city of the great King, Ps.48:1-14. The people will see God in Zion, Ps.84:7. There the Lord will appear in glory, Ps.102:16.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ZION IN THE CHURCH AGE

Many of the Old Testament prophets went on to see the growing spiritual significance of Zion in the time of the Church Age. In Amos 9:11-12 it was prophesied that the Tabernacle of David (on Zion) was going to be rebuilt. The early Church leaders understood that this would be spiritually fulfilled in the Church (study Acts 15:14-17).

Isaiah saw that revival in the last days would come to Zion. He declared, *"When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning, then the Lord will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering,"* Is.4:4-5. A generally accepted interpretation of this prophecy is that it will be fulfilled in the Church of the last days. Those who accept the purging and dealings of the Holy Spirit will be prepared for glorious revival!

Obadiah had a further revelation about Zion. He saw that the conflict between the descendants of Jacob and Esau would be brought to final victory on Mount Zion. This is prophetic of the conflict between the ungodly and the righteous in the last days. The final victory of the righteous is described in this way, in verse 21: *"Then saviors shall come to Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom shall be the Lord's."* These 'saviors,' also translated as 'deliverers' in many Bible versions,

does not singularly speak of the work of Christ at the end of this age. It speaks collectively of the overcoming saints, the sons of God whom the world is waiting to see revealed, Rom.8:19-21.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ZION IN THE MILLENNIUM

Other Old Testament prophets continued to have an expanded vision of Zion's purposes not only in the last days, but also into the Millennium. Micah and Isaiah both prophesied that Mount Zion would be exalted to lead and teach the nations. We read, *"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off...nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more...so the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on, even forever."* -Micah 4:1-3 & 6-7.

This prophecy can speak of how the Lord will exalt His Church in the last days, but its complete fulfillment will be during the millennium. In Psalms 2 and 110, we can further read how King David prophesied that the Messiah would reign from Zion. Just as King David ruled over his great international empire from Zion; even so the Lord Jesus, the Son of David, will rule the world from Zion during the millennium. The nations of the earth will send their delegations every year to Jerusalem to worship the King of kings, the Lord Jesus, Zech.14:16-17.

So we can see throughout the Old Testament that Zion was the place where authority (the throne of the king) and God's worship and glory (the ark of God) were revealed. This authority and glory from Zion was prophesied to be spread throughout the world through the Church. Then during the millennium it will continue to be revealed to the nations from Mount Zion in Jerusalem, where the King of kings will rule and be worshipped.

THE HEAVENLY ZION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

As we go on to study the New Testament, we find that the vision of Zion is lifted much higher. From the heights of world dominion in the Old Testament, Mount Zion is revealed in the New Testament as the heavenly center of God's presence and glory!

In Hebrews 12:22-24 we read the following about the heavenly destination of the Christian: *"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel."*

Here we see that there is a heavenly Mount Zion and Jerusalem, just as there is an earthly Mount Zion and Jerusalem. This heavenly Jerusalem is described for us in Revelation chapter 21. Just as there is a location in the earthly city of Jerusalem called Mount Zion, where the throne of the king and the worship of God were located, we find this is also true of the heavenly city. In Revelation 14:1-3 we read, *"Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of*

harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth."

This scripture reveals that those who will stand with the Lamb on the heavenly Mount Zion will be singing their worship before the throne, the four living creatures, and the elders. This clearly shows us that the heavenly Mount Zion is at the throne of God Almighty as described in Revelation chapter 4. So just as the earthly Zion is the place of the throne and of worship, we find that the true Zion in heaven is at the throne of God and is the center of worship.

Many people have had visions and dreams of the various parts of heaven. There are the floral gardens and forested areas of the outer paradise. There is also the heavenly city, with many streets, people, and places where various events take place. But the most wonderful place of all is at the throne of God where His glory, power, and worship are fully revealed. This is the heavenly Mount Zion!

When new converts or 'babes in Christ' go to heaven, they first arrive at the outer edges of paradise. The beauty and joy that they partake of there are overwhelming, and they may stay there for a long time to get adjusted to these lesser glories of heaven.

Other saints may be ready to enter the heavenly city when they die. They find that this city has twelve gates named after the twelve tribes of Israel, Rev.21:12-13. These gates also speak of the various spiritual experiences that the Israelite tribes had entered into. According to their own spiritual experiences on earth, the saints will find entrance into the various parts of the heavenly city where they will be with others of similar calling and development.

However, the highest place of authority and glory will be given to those who are around the throne of God. Not everyone will be prepared or will qualify for this level of experience. We can study in the Scriptures how the resurrected saints will each be filled with varying amounts of glory, just as the stars, moon, and sun shining in the sky (see 1 Cor.15:41-42 & Dan.12:2-3). The saints will each be ready for different levels of authority, such as kings, governors, and mayors (study Rev.2:26-27; Jer.30:9; Mt.19:28; and Lk.19:11-17). And as we have already considered with the parallel of the ancient nation of Israel, we can remember that only some of the Israelites lived in Jerusalem, and fewer still lived near the throne on Mount Zion.

THE HIGH CALL OF GOD

Understanding these truths will open up much of the Scriptures to us. As we study about Zion, the vision can grow brighter that there is a glorious calling available to each Christian who wholeheartedly prepares himself. Some Christians may be saved, and be merely content to escape hell. Others may start to gain an interest in gathering eternal heavenly rewards. But the Christian with an enlarged vision and a pure heart will want nothing short of God's best. We will be gripped with the desire, like the Apostle Paul, to *"press toward the goal for the prize of the high call of God in Christ Jesus,"* Phil.3:14. This calling is available to every Christian who will dedicate themselves to fulfill all of God's will, regardless of their background. The key is not where we have come from, but where we are spiritually going!

THE HIGHWAYS TO ZION

The Psalmist said, *"How blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are the highways to Zion! Passing through the valley of Baca [or, 'weeping'], they make it a spring... They go from strength to strength, every one of them appears before God in Zion,"* Psalm 84:5-7 NASV. This speaks to the New Testament Christian of how we need to have our hearts centered on obtaining the goal of standing before God at His throne in heaven. Through all the tears of our earthly pilgrimage, God can comfort, refresh, and lift us higher and higher. If our heart is fixed on obtaining an eternal inheritance at His throne, we can go from strength to strength and from glory to glory until we will appear before God at the heavenly Zion. As our Lord Jesus said, *"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne,"* Rev.3:21.

Have you caught the vision that it is possible to sit with Christ on His throne for eternity to come? Are you pressing on toward the high call of God for your life? Do you have the highways to Zion built in your heart that will lead you on towards obtaining this goal? John the Baptist was sent with a ministry of repentance to build that highway in his generation. He was a voice crying in the wilderness, *"Make straight...a highway,"* Is.40:3-5; Mt.3:1-3. Isaiah chapter 35:8-10 also tells us more about that highway that would be built in the wilderness. There it is called the "Highway of Holiness" that would lead God's people on to Zion.

THE VISION OF ZION

The Lord wants to plant a vision within the heart of each of His people. There are going to be great revivals throughout the world in these last days. The assemblies of Mount Zion, composed of every church that is pressing on in holiness towards the high call of God, will be covered with His glory, Is.4:3-6. The Lord will exalt His Church to great authority and glory, to help prepare the way for the Second Coming of Christ. After returning to judge the nations and bind Satan and his hosts, the Lord Jesus will then reign over the world from Mt. Zion in Jerusalem for one thousand years, Is.24:21-23; Rev.20:1-6. Moreover, in heaven the Lord sits on His throne in Zion, where He invites the overcomers to sit with Him on His throne and reign with Him in glory throughout eternity.

Do these truths stir your heart to run after God's best? If so, let us join together to help build this vision within the Body of Christ. As the Psalmist said in Psalm 102:13-22,

"You will have mercy upon Zion; for the time to favor her, yes, the set time, has come... So the nations shall fear the name of the Lord, and all kings of the earth Your glory. For the Lord will build up Zion; He shall appear in His glory. He shall regard the prayer of the destitute, and shall not despise their prayer. This shall be written for the generation to come... To declare the name of the Lord in Zion, and His praise in Jerusalem, when the peoples are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the Lord."

- This article by Norman Holmes was adapted from his book, "The Hope of the Christian." Rev. Holmes has lived in Asia as a missionary for the last 19 years, and has written 6 books, directs a Bible school, and conducts pastors' seminars in many nations.