

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

There are many different conceptions about what is “the Kingdom of God”. It has been assumed by many theologians that it is a place in heaven where our spirit or soul goes to at our death. One of the excerpts used to justify that claim are the following words: ***“In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.”*** John 14:2. The word 'mansion' comes from the Latin word 'mansiones' found in the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible and means 'a resting place for a traveler on his journey.' The Greek word for 'mansiones' was 'mone' and as found in Strong's Greek Dictionary means 'a staying, ie. Residence, an abode'. When we reside at this abode in our Father's house, it will not be a temporary stop-over as the Latin 'mansiones' suggests, but will be a permanent place of residence for the righteous of which there will be no end.

The scriptures tell us that Jesus is the only one who has been received into the heavens, and that he will prepare a place for the faithful at his coming. ***“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”*** John 1:18; ***“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”*** John 14:3. To have a better understanding of these verses, let us read the following words of Jesus: ***“In my Father's house are many abodes...”*** We have replaced the word 'mansions' with the correct word 'abodes' to reflect the true meaning that in God's kingdom, there is plenty of room to accommodate all those who have earned eternal life.

What about God's “house”? Does God really need a house or residence to reside in? We are told from scripture that God is a spirit and needs no residence because He is omnipotent and omnipresent. ***“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”*** John 4:24; ***“Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet. Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? Saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?”*** Acts 7:48, 49; ***“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee: how much less this house [ie. the temple] that I have builded?”*** I Kings 8:27; ***“Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.”*** Jeremiah 23:24. So when Jesus refers to the Father's “house”, what is he referring to if God doesn't need any building and cannot be contained by the earth itself? No one knows to where Jesus ascended other than into the bosom of the Father and is in His spiritual care. The abode of God cannot be situated in a stationary place for we have read that God cannot be contained by a building, the earth nor heaven. The answer is the New Jerusalem, which Jesus will bring with him when God decides to send him back to earth. All those who work to enter the Kingdom of God shall find a place on a cleansed earth. ***“And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”*** Revelations 21:2; ***“But ye are come onto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels...”*** Hebrews 12:22. See also Revelations 3:12. The temple which is the house of God (the tabernacle of the heavenly Jerusalem), should not be taken literally, but as symbolic, for no temple, city or mountain can contain God, who is omnipresent but we can have the spirit or Will of God within ourselves. The Bible speaks of a new heavenly city – this could be the spiritual oneness the righteous have in God. ***“God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is LORD of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands.”*** Acts 17:24; ***“Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that you build unto me? And where is the place of my rest?”*** Isaiah 66:1; ***“And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with***

observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, lo there! For, behold, the kingdom of God is within [among] you." Luke 17:20, 21. Is the new Jerusalem a literal physical manifestation that will occupy this earth? It is difficult to say especially given the symbolism that the Scriptures contain, particularly in Daniel and Revelations. The book of Revelations contains many symbols such as a year representing a thousand years, seven stars representing angels of the seven churches, the seven candlesticks representing the seven churches, the seven lamps of burning fire being the seven spirits of God and so on. Due to the many symbols of these books of prophecy, different churches have different interpretations of what the symbols represent. However, there are certain prophecies that we can be sure of their interpretations.

In describing New Jerusalem, Revelations tells us: **"And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."** Revelations 21:14. Paul also spoke of the twelve apostles being the foundation of the Church of God. **"And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone."** Ephesians 2:20. So is the scriptures talking about literal stones or stones in a symbolic sense? **"And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel... And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel."** Revelations 7:4; 21:12. The stones are symbolic of those who are faithful to God and His Son. The faithful are the spiritual stones that comprise the body of Christ. **"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."** I Peter 2:5; **"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens 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 cornerstone; 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."** Ephesians 2:19 to 22.

Revelations further describes New Jerusalem: **"...and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass... and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I say no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it."** Revelations 21:18b, 21b, 22; **"In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life..."** Revelations 22:2a. Again, we might ask whether Jesus will bring with him a new physical or material city or is New Jerusalem simply the renewed earthly abode of God's righteous? There is no doubt that God is capable of doing anything such as transporting a city back to earth but due to the symbolism in Revelations, it is difficult to say whether it was meant to describe the immense physical beauty of the earth when it is renewed or whether New Jerusalem will literally exist as described in the last book of the Bible.

We do know that the city represents the new kingdom of God and it will be the abode of the saints of God who will have been transformed into new incorruptible bodies fit to live in a cleansed earth. **"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."** Matthew 25:34; **"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."** Revelations 22:14; **"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."** Revelations 2:7. The tree of life represents the gift for those saints who have been resurrected by God to eternal life. The tree of life is also representative of a renewing of life, one wherein the faithful shall never see death. Mankind had the opportunity of eternal life just after creation but sinned against God and lost the gift of regenerating life. The source of eternal life was forfeited to the rest of mankind until another man arose with the spirit of righteousness within him. Just as it was immediately after

creation (Genesis 2:8, 9), we read that the tree of life will be in the midst of paradise, that paradise being on a cleansed earth. Our heaven or paradise will be on the earth in which God had made for us in the beginning; paradise will not be a home in the celestial heavens. ***“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.”*** Matthew 6:10; ***“And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”*** Revelations 5:10; ***“For, behold, I create new heavens and new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind... And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.”*** Isaiah 65:17, 21, 22. There will be plenty to do in the new kingdom; it will not be sitting on a cloud, playing a harp.

The New Jerusalem represents the establishment of God's Kingdom on this earth. Jesus spoke many times of this kingdom to come during his ministry on this earth. ***“And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”*** Matthew 24:30, 31; ***“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick [ie. The living] and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom...”*** II Timothy 4:1. The kingdom of God will be set up with those who possess the love of obedience towards God and His Christ, however, the new kingdom and the New Jerusalem will not take place until the old world of evilness is done away with completely, and the earth is cleansed to the pure state it was once in at the time of Creation.