

The Answering Service

FROM AMERICA'S PROMISE

Answers to questions from Radio and Tape Listeners

No. 4 - May 1, 1980

Question No. 1:

I enjoyed your booklet, "The Old Jerusalem Is Not the New Jerusalem," but how do I explain to others the 1500-mile cube that John states is a city in Revelation 21:16?

Answer:

The picture we are given in **Revelation 21:10-27**, is highly symbolic. It should be read in conjunction with **Zechariah 2**, in which this New Jerusalem is not really a regular city at all, but is rather an entire Kingdom; the nation of Israel, "the Bride, the Lamb's wife." It comes complete with citizens, laws, a King and boundaries (walls), and it includes many "towns" (**Zech. 2:4**).

The "foundations" of this city are the 12 Apostles (**Rev. 21:14**). We doubt that they will be physically holding up a 1500 cubic mile city in the Kingdom! The 144 cubit high wall around the city is a "wall of fire" (**Zech. 2:5**); that is, it is bounded by God's Law (the "fiery Law" of **Deut. 33:2**), and God's Law is what keeps the sinners outside of the city, according to **Revelation 22:15**.

All of these details are symbolic. God is not going to lower a huge, cubed city down upon the planet earth with a heavenly crane. Actually, it is quite possible that the shape of the structure being described here, is not a cube at all, but a pyramid, with the length and width of the base being equal to the height. The capstone of

that pyramid is Christ, Himself, who is said to be "the head of the corner" in **Matthew 21:42**. Paul tells us in **Ephesians 2:19-22**, that we, Christian Israelites, are in the process of being "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."

You see, the "capstones" on ancient pyramids were made into temples. Thus, the "building. . . groweth unto an holy Temple," and that temple is Jesus Christ, our God (**Rev. 21:22**). The entire structure is symbolic, and to take parts of it literally would be inconsistent and do violence to Scripture.

The point of all this is to say that the numbers which "measure" the city are just as symbolic as are the other details. All of the numbers revolve around the number 12, which is the number of governmental perfection. There are 12 angels guarding 12 gates with 12 pearls on them in a wall that is 144 (12 x 12) cubits high, garnished with 12 stones, representing the 12 tribes of Israel. This wall encircles a "city" 12,000 furlongs high, wide, and long that is built upon a foundation of the 12 apostles. There will, also, be 144 (12 x 12) thousand inhabitants of that city, representing the 12 tribes of Israel.

The New Jerusalem is the reconstructed house of Israel, and its reconstruction

began with the death and resurrection of Christ.. When completed during this present age, the "capstone" that was formerly rejected will be set in its rightful place (i. e., Christ will return to rule His Kingdom).

Like the city, foundation, stones, walls, gates and temple; the numbers used in the book of Revelation are symbolic of the lost house of Israel being regathered under the rulership of Christ to their own land, separated from those who are outside (**Rev. 22:15**), and protected by the wall of God's Law.

Question No. 2:

Matthew 27:51-54 seems to indicate that there was a resurrection of some saints at the same time Christ died or was raised from the dead. My minister says that Jesus took these Christians to heaven with Him, and he uses this passage to prove his point. What can I tell him?

Answer:

We are given only a few clues as to what actually occurred here, since Matthew is the only writer who refers to this event directly, unless we take **John 5:25** to be prophetic of this event.

The passage does NOT say that these saints received immortality, and it does NOT say (nor does any other passage) that they went to heaven with Christ. Those conclusions are your minister's own personal interpretation. We believe that this resurrection was limited to a very few people. If it had included all Old Testament believers, as some teach, Jerusalem would have been rather crowded until Jesus left for heaven, 40 days later. (There would have been tens or hundreds of thousands.) The resurrection in **Matt. 27:51-54**, then, would have been of

a few saints raised, like Lazarus as a miraculous witness to Christ's resurrection.

The case of the raising of Lazarus shows us that it is possible to raise a man to life, without making him immortal (**see John 11**). Lazarus lived for quite a while after Jesus raised him, but he later died in Marseilles, France, where he had ministered for many years. His grave is still there for all to see.

1 Corinthians 15:23 gives us the order and timing of Christ's resurrection in relation to "they that are Christ's" (i.e., Christians, including the believers in the Old Testament period): "But every man in his own order; Christ the firstfruits; AFTERWARD, they that are Christ's AT HIS COMING." Since Paul was writing many years after Christ's first coming, he was obviously speaking of His SECOND coming.

It is possible that Paul had this very issue in mind, when he wrote to Timothy about two men named Hymenaeus and Philetus, "who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some" (**2 Tim. 2:18**). These men obviously taught that a resurrection of believers had already taken place. Paul viewed this doctrine as a threat to our faith in the future resurrection.

It is, therefore, much more credible for us to believe that the resurrection to immortality is yet future, "that they, without us, should not be made perfect" (**Heb. 11:40**). It will take place when Christ returns to save His people from their enemies and rule over His Bride in the Kingdom Age.

Question No. 3

You say there is no burning hell, and yet I read in Revelation 20:15 about sinners being cast into the lake of fire. How do you explain that?

Question:

First of all, this verse says nothing about men being tortured in that 'fire." It does not even tell us that those sinners will be immortal and will remain alive while that "fire" tortures them for eternity. If the fire were literal, then the most we could say is that the sinners would be burned up and destroyed.

The problem usually arises when we fail to read **Daniel 7** along with **Revelation 20**. **Daniel 7:9 & 10** speaks of the great judgment: ". . . His throne was like the fiery flame; and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him; thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the judgment was set, and the books were opened."

Daniel pictures the "lake of fire" as issuing from God and His throne. The throne is a universal symbol of Law. A king sitting upon a throne pictures that king ruling by Law and judging the people by means of Law. Thus, the fiery throne of **Daniel 7:9** is actually the fiery Law of God by which God judges all men. **Deut. 33:2** speaks of God's Law as a "fiery Law," and **Jeremiah 23:9** says, "Is not my word like as a fire?"

So it all boils down to one thing: If you want to learn the nature of the "lake of fire," you must learn the basic principles of God's Law by which God judges all sin. Does God's Law demand torture for sin? No, for Paul tells us that "the wages of sin is death." (Note: it does NOT say "spiritual death.")

It is a basic principle of Bible Law that justice is never satisfied until full restitution has been paid to all the victims of injustice. Our modern minds have been conditioned by tradition to believe that justice is when the criminal has been properly tortured on the rack or behind bars, but these penalties for sin are not found in God's Law.

Rather, God's Law demands restitution, because the purpose and goal of God's judgments are: **(1)** to repay all victims of injustice; and **(2)** to correct and rehabilitate the sinner. God's judgments are much like a parent disciplining a child in this way. God's fiery judgment is corrective in nature, as **Isaiah 26:9** says: "When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness."

The lake of fire is described in **Rev. 21:8** as "the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone." The Greek word translated "brimstone," actually means sulfur, but the word has a double meaning. The original Greek word is *theo*, usually translated "God." Sulphur, or *theo*, was considered to be sacred to the ancient Greeks. It was used to purify and cleanse. Thus, in its verb form the word means to hallow, make divine or to dedicate to God.

Thus, the lake of fire and brimstone is a lake of divine purification or consecration to God. Its purpose will be to correct and purify the sinner, not simply to torture him or even annihilate him. Those who are cast into this lake of fire will be forced to pay restitution for all the sins they committed, since they did not place their faith in the righteousness of Christ and receive forgiveness of sins. We may not know how God is going to judge each sin, but God has given us His righteous and just Law that we may know the basic

principles of true justice. Let us not be swayed by the "justice" of the world, with its imprisonment and torture.
