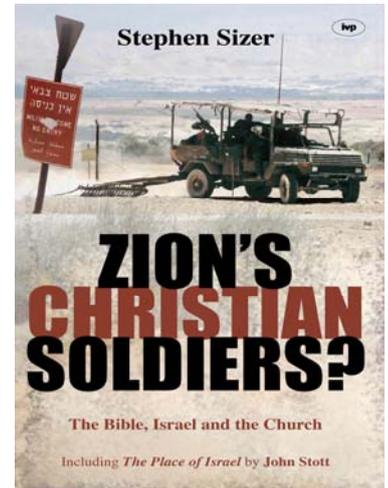


## Seminar 4 Battle for Jerusalem: The Eternal Capital of the Jews?

Many evangelicals, especially in America, accept unthinkingly the Zionist mantra that Jerusalem is the undivided, eternal and exclusive capital of the State of Israel. However, Jerusalem existed before the time of the Israelites. Today, Jerusalem lies at the heart of three world faiths – Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Israelis regard it as their capital. Palestinians do so also.



Attempts to reach agreement in the wider Arab-Israeli conflict have partly stumbled over the contested status of Jerusalem. Jewish Zionists and their Christian supporters are strongly opposed to joint sovereignty or the recognition of East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. It seems time is on their side. The annexation of the Old City, the aggressive and illegal settlement programme, the systematic demolition of many Arab homes and the construction of the Separation Barrier have all created 'facts on the ground' in Jerusalem. Christian and Jewish Zionists also claim a higher mandate for this agenda – the Word of God.

In this chapter we will consider why Jerusalem is so important to Christian Zionists and why they feel it can only be the exclusive capital of Israel. Then we will examine the place of the Jerusalem in the Old Testament, and in particular some of the prophecies of Isaiah and Zechariah. Then we will see what Jesus and the Apostles have to say about the place of Jerusalem in the New Covenant and especially in the End Times.

### The Passion for Jerusalem

Following the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, Billy Graham's father-in-law, Nelson Bell, reflect the sentiments of many American Christians when he wrote, "That for the first time in more than 2,000 years Jerusalem is now completely in the hands of the Jews gives a student of the Bible a thrill and a renewed faith in the accuracy and validity of the Bible."<sup>1</sup>

Four years after the capture of Jerusalem, in June 1971, Carl Henry, then editor of *Christianity Today*, and considered the 'Dean' of American evangelical theologians,

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson Bell, editorial, *Christianity Today*, July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1967, p. 28.

hosted a gathering in Jerusalem of over 1,200 evangelical leaders from 32 different countries. Welcomed by David Ben Gurion, the conference was billed as “the first conference of its kind since A.D. 59”. Speakers including W.A. Criswell, Harold Ockenga and John Walvoord, celebrated “the regathering of Israel from the ends of the earth” and the capture of Jerusalem. These events were seen as “confirmation that Jews and Israel still had a role to play in God’s ordering of history” and that the return of Jesus was imminent.<sup>2</sup>

The wider international community saw things rather differently. In protest at Israel’s unilateral annexation of East Jerusalem and the West Bank, the United Nations passed Resolution 242, calling on Israel to withdraw its troops to the June 1967 borders and end the occupation. Refusing to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, the few remaining government embassies were closed and relocated to Tel Aviv. In 1980, the International Christian Embassy (ICEJ) was founded in Jerusalem, to express solidarity with Israel and to recognise a divine blessing in the ‘Reunification’ of Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty. At the International Christian Zionist Congress in 1996, some 1,500 participants signed the following declaration.

Because of the sovereign purposes of God for the City, Jerusalem must remain undivided, under Israeli sovereignty, open to all peoples, the capital of Israel only, and all nations should so concur and place their embassies here ... the truths of God are sovereign and it is written that the Land which He promised to His People is not to be partitioned.<sup>3</sup>

In 1997 the ICEJ also gave support to a full page advert placed in the *New York Times* entitled, ‘Christians Call for a United Jerusalem.’ It was signed by 10 evangelical leaders including Pat Robertson, chairman of Christian Broadcasting Network and President of the Christian Coalition; Oral Roberts, founder and chancellor of Oral Roberts University; Jerry Falwell, founder of Moral Majority; Ed McAteer, President of the Religious Roundtable; and David Allen Lewis, President of Christians United for Israel:

We, the undersigned Christian spiritual leaders, communicating weekly to more than 100 million Christian Americans, are proud to join together in supporting the continued sovereignty of the State of Israel over the holy city of Jerusalem. We support Israel’s efforts to reach reconciliation with its Arab neighbors, but we believe that Jerusalem, or any portion of it, shall not be

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Prophets in Jerusalem’ *Newsweek*, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1971, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> ‘International Christian Zionist Congress Proclamation’ International Christian Embassy, Jerusalem. 25-29 February (1996).

negotiable in the peace process. Jerusalem must remain undivided as the eternal capital of the Jewish people.<sup>4</sup>

They called upon fellow Christians to ‘Join us in our holy mission to ensure that Jerusalem will remain the undivided, eternal capital of Israel.’ ‘The battle for Jerusalem has begun, and it is time for believers in Christ to support our Jewish brethren and the State of Israel. The time for unity with the Jewish people is now.’<sup>5</sup> They believe this will be achieved by the implementation of the Jerusalem Embassy Act, which legislates for the return of the US embassy back to Jerusalem. Funds have already been allocated. However, for more than ten years, successive US Presidents have vetoed the legislation for reasons of national security. Mike Evans, an outspoken critic argues,

Each time the national security waver is signed, we are saying to terrorists and bigots, ‘You win.’ America needs the blessings of God more than the favour with Arab bigots. Mr. Bush needs to send a signal to all the would-be Osamas that the party is over. No longer will America allow terrorists to threaten our nation into choosing political expediency over moral clarity.<sup>6</sup>

John Hagee, pastor of a mega-church in San Antonio, Texas, says that the special status afforded the Jewish people by God supersedes the rule of international law:

A shared Jerusalem? Never! A “shared Jerusalem” means control of the Holy City would be wrested away from the Jewish people and given, at least in part, to the Palestine Liberation Organisation. I say “never” ... because the Word of God says it is God’s will for Jerusalem to be under the exclusive control of the Jewish people until Messiah comes ... God doesn’t care what the United Nations thinks ... He gave Jerusalem to the nation of Israel, and it is theirs.<sup>7</sup>

In 2003, the Jerusalem Summit, sponsored by the Unity Coalition for Israel, issued their ‘Jerusalem Declaration’ in which they called upon the international community to recognise:

Billions of people believe that Jerusalem's spiritual and historical importance endows it with a special authority to become a center of world's unity. Israel's unique geographic and historic position at the crossroads of civilizations enables it to reconcile their conflicts. Israel's unique spiritual experience enables it to find a golden mean between the fault lines dividing

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1 <sup>4</sup> ‘Christians Call for a United Jerusalem’ *New York Times*, 18 April (1997), <http://www.cdn-friends-icej.ca/united.html>

2 <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>6</sup> Mike Evans, ‘Israel does not exist!’, [www.freeman.org/m\\_online/apr04/evans.htm](http://www.freeman.org/m_online/apr04/evans.htm)

<sup>7</sup> John Hagee, *Jerusalem Betrayed* (Dallas, Word, 1997), p. 42.

civilizations: between tradition and modernity, religion and science, authority and democracy.

We call upon all nations to choose Jerusalem, the eternal and indivisible capital of Israel, as a center for this evolving new unity. We believe that one of the objectives of Israel's divinely-inspired rebirth is to make it the center of the new unity of the nations, which will lead to an era of peace and prosperity, foretold by the Prophets.<sup>8</sup>

So they want Jerusalem to be a place of unity for the world, but not for the people who live there! If this is representative of how pro-Zionist Christians view Jerusalem, perhaps its time we looked at what the Scriptures have to say.

### **Jerusalem in the Old Testament**

The story of Jerusalem goes way back as far as Genesis. It is possible that Jerusalem was the home of the Melchizedek the priest and king who blessed Abraham in Genesis 14. He is referred to as the 'king of Salem' which later became identified in Jewish tradition with Jerusalem. Mount Moriah, where Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice, is also later identified in 2 Chronicles 3 as the same place where Solomon built his Temple. Clearly, Jerusalem had an existence long before the conquest of the land by the Israelites. In Joshua 15:63, for example, we find the Jebusites already living in Jerusalem and willing to share the city with the new Jewish immigrants. It is clear therefore that Jerusalem was a shared city long before King David turned it into his capital (2 Samuel 6:1-19). Even then, the capture was achieved with minimal casualties on either side. It is also just possible that Zadok, David's High Priest, was a Jebusite (1 Kings 2:35; 1 Chronicles 29:22) - Zedek was the Jebusite god of justice. So when Israel celebrated the 'Trimillennium of Jerusalem, City of David', in 1996, under the banner 'Jerusalem 3000', there was some legitimacy to the counter claim launched by the Palestinian Authority to 'Jerusalem 5000'!

Clearly the building of the Temple in Jerusalem by David's son, Solomon, elevated the status of the city among the tribes of Israel. However, when God judged Solomon for his idolatry (1 Kings 11:9-13) and his empire was split in two by Rehoboam and

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<sup>8</sup> The Jerusalem Summit, The Jerusalem Declaration" [http://www.jerusalemsummit.org/eng/declaration\\_full.php](http://www.jerusalemsummit.org/eng/declaration_full.php)  
<Accessed March 2007>

Jeroboam, Jerusalem diminished in importance and became just the capital for the tribe of Judah. As Peter Walker admits, “The city designed to bring unity now pointed instead to Israel’s division.”<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the belief grew that Jerusalem was invincible, because God dwelt in the Temple and his anointed king was on the throne. Prophets such as Micah (3:9-12) and Jeremiah (7:1-11) warned against this arrogance. Jeremiah highlights one of the popular mantras of the day. “Do not trust in deceptive words and say ‘This is the Temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!’” (Jeremiah 7:4). Indeed, the prophet predicted that, far from defending Jerusalem in a ‘holy war’, God would actually become her enemy (Jeremiah 21:3-10).

The prophecies against Jerusalem came true in the capture and destruction of the city by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC. The catastrophic events and the consequent exile of the Jews are recorded in 2 Kings 25; Jeremiah 52 and Lamentations. The prophetic message is clear. God holds his people morally accountable and will tolerate neither arrogance or complacency.

Authors like Hal Lindsey tend to ignore or minimize these warnings preferring instead to focus on passages that speak of the significance of Jerusalem:

Jerusalem’s importance in history is infinitely beyond its size and economic significance. From ages past, Jerusalem has been the most important city on this planet ... More prophecies have been made concerning Jerusalem than any other place on earth.<sup>10</sup>

One of these prophecies is found in Zechariah 14. It is frequently cited as evidence that one day soon all the nations of the earth will come to worship God in a newly built Temple in Jerusalem. This is what Zechariah predicts:

I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city... Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. (Zechariah 14:2, 16)

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Walker, ‘Jerusalem’ in eds. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Leicester, IVP, 2000), p. 589.

<sup>10</sup> Hal Lindsey, *Israel and the Last Days* (Eugene, Oregon, Harvest House, 1983), p. 20.

Lindsey believes this prophecy is speaking about today and an imminent siege of Jerusalem by the Soviet army rather than what happened in 70AD:

There couldn't be a more perfect modern-day description of what was predicted hundreds of years ago in Zechariah 12-14. There it tells us that the last war of the world will be started by a dispute over Jerusalem. We've got that dispute right now. As a matter of fact, the West helped guarantee the world a dispute over Jerusalem by forcing the Israelis into a pact with the Palestinians.<sup>11</sup>

It was probably Cyrus Scofield who first popularised the idea that the Russians will attack Jerusalem in fulfilment of this prophecy and, "...that destruction should fall at the climax of the last mad attempt to exterminate the remnant of Israel in Jerusalem."<sup>12</sup> How much of Jerusalem will be left standing when Jesus returns is a matter of speculation, given Lindsey's terrifying description of the war of Armageddon (more on this in chapter 7).

The Bible also makes clear that Jerusalem - the focal point of the endtimes fighting - will be vanquished by Israel's enemies in the hours just before the Lord comes. In fact, it seems that the destruction of the holy city is the final straw that angers God and provokes Jesus' return.<sup>13</sup>

Lindsey nevertheless looks forward to a better day after Armageddon, when, during the Millennium, 'Jerusalem will be the spiritual centre of the entire world... all people of the earth will come annually to worship Jesus who will rule there.'<sup>14</sup>

Now before we get carried away with this colourful interpretation of Zechariah, let's look again at the text. And remember ultra-literalism is like a sword – it cuts both ways. Notice that the purpose for 'going up to Jerusalem' is to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles – something the International Christian Embassy does every Autumn in preparation, as they see it, to the fulfilment of this prophecy. However, if you know your Old Testament feasts, you will know that the Feast of Tabernacles involves offering a rather large number of animal sacrifices (See Numbers 29:12-40 for the sacrifices expected - bulls, rams and lambs – and lots of them). If this makes you feel

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<sup>11</sup> Hal Lindsey, *Planet Earth A.D. Will Mankind Survive?* (Palos Verdes, California, Western Front, 1994), p. 247.

<sup>12</sup> Cyrus Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1917), fn. 1, p. 883.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>14</sup> Lindsey, *Israel and the Last Days* (Eugene, Oregon, Harvest House, 1983), p. 165.

a little nervous - and it should - check out verse 15 where Zechariah describes the mode of transportation that will be used – ‘horses, mules, the camels and donkeys’ (Zechariah 14:15). This perhaps gives us a clue that Zechariah is describing events rather closer to his own day or using contemporary imagery to describe future events surrounding the return of Jesus, the details of which (like the animal sacrifices, military tactics and means of transport) we do not therefore need to take literally. They are intended to encourage readers to trust in God’s Messiah who will overthrow evil and establish God’s rule on earth for ever. What Zechariah predicts – the heathen nations coming to worship the one true God – is further developed in the Psalms and Isaiah.

In Psalm 87 we have a beautiful picture of a shared Jerusalem, an international and inclusive city where residency rights are determined by God on the basis of faith not race.

He has founded his city on the holy mountain. The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the other dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are said of you, city of God: “I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me— Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush — and will say, ‘This one was born in Zion.’ “Indeed, of Zion it will be said, “This one and that one were born in her, and the Most High himself will establish her.” The LORD will write in the register of the peoples: “This one was born in Zion.” As they make music they will sing, “All my fountains are in you.” (Psalm 87)

As Colin Chapman has observed, “This is a message which must have challenged many nationalistic prejudices.”<sup>15</sup> And one might add - still does.

Isaiah’s vision of Jerusalem is also an inclusive one. In Isaiah 2, for example we learn that people of many different nations will come to Jerusalem and put their faith in God and walk in his ways. One of the glorious consequences of this is that Jerusalem will become associated with the end of war, and with peace and reconciliation between the nations (Isaiah 2:3-5).

The glorious future of Jerusalem is therefore one that impacts and benefits the entire world. His vision is of an inclusive and shared Jerusalem in which the nations, just as much as the Jewish people, are blessed. Perhaps this is why, when Jesus rebuked the religious leaders for exploiting the international visitors to the temple, he quotes

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<sup>15</sup> Colin Chapman, *Whose Holy City?* (Oxford, Lion, 2004), p. 30.

from Isaiah, “For my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” (Isaiah 56:7, cf. Matthew 21:13).

So, despite what some would have us believe, the Old Testament vision of Jerusalem in the future is of an international, shared, inclusive city of faith, hope and love.

### **Jerusalem in the New Testament**

So what does the New Testament add to this vision? Well, there is some good news and some bad news. First, the bad news. It may surprise you to learn that the New Testament is rather pessimistic about the fate of Jerusalem. Far from promising a prosperous future at the centre of a revived Jewish state or even a millennial kingdom, Jesus lamented the impending destruction of Jerusalem. Luke’s gospel provides us with several insights into the passion of Jesus for Jerusalem. In Luke 13 we find Jesus rebuking the leaders of Israel for not caring for the people in the way he does and predicting that he must die there. Evoking the language of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 12:7; 22:5), Jesus similarly laments:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’ (Luke 13:34-35)

Quoting Psalm 118:26, Jesus also draws attention perhaps to a psalm in which, a few verses earlier, there is an enigmatic reference to his Messianic role “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” (Psalm 118:22). In the proceeding verses Jesus contrasts his motives with those of Herod and the leaders of Jerusalem. He displays the instincts of a protective mother concerned for the people of Jerusalem as if they were his very children. A little later, on Palm Sunday, Jesus expresses perhaps his strongest emotions toward the city and its fickle people:

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you. (Luke 19:41-44)

Again, Jesus is using the language of Isaiah and Ezekiel to warn of God's impending judgement (Isaiah 29:3; Ezekiel 4:2). Now if you were there and heard Jesus make that prediction, who would you imagine he had in mind? Who were the hated enemies? The Romans of course. With the benefit of hindsight it's obvious that Jesus was warning the people about what was going to happen very soon, not events 2000 years or more in the distant future. With the total destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD, stone by stone, the slaughter of tens of thousands of Jews and the exile of the remnant as slaves of Rome, Jesus' sad prediction came true, to the letter.

### **The Times of the Gentiles**

But what about Luke 21:24 you may be thinking? This is a favourite verse among Christian Zionists because they believe it describes the events of June 1967 and justifies the subsequent occupation and annexation of the Old City and East Jerusalem by Israel. Here are the words of Jesus, in context.

When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. (Luke 21:20-28)

Hal Lindsey and Mike Evans are just two of the many contemporary prophecy experts who believe this passage is referring to our generation. In 1994 Lindsey was claiming "We are literally witnessing the end of the times of the Gentiles."<sup>16</sup> A year later he was a little more specific. "We are literally witnessing the last hours of the

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<sup>16</sup> Lindsey, *Planet.*, op. cit., p. 164.

times of the Gentiles. God’s focus is shifting back to his people Israel.”<sup>17</sup> Mike Evans goes further, suggesting the ‘times of the Gentiles’ are now over.

Through the centuries this prophecy has stood as an immovable landmark by which we may gauge the often confusing events of Jewish history... Jesus’ words, spoken so long ago, make the city’s recapture by the Jews, the single most prophetic event in history... The time of the Gentiles is now past and there has been a changing of the guard. Men may argue and pontificate, but something irrevocable has happened: Jerusalem is no longer trodden down by non-Jews. History has turned a corner - even if few have noticed it.<sup>18</sup>

What Evans and others have done with this passage is what might be described as exegesis by contemporary events, that is – reading back into Scripture subsequent events in history. The various editions of the Scofield Reference Bible provide a good example of this tendency. Notice how the footnote to Luke 21:24 changes after 1967 and becomes more enigmatic.

	<b>The Scofield Reference Bible (1917)</b>	<b>The New Scofield Study Bible (1984)</b>
Luke 21:24	The “times of the Gentiles” began with the captivity of Judah under Nebuchadnezzar, since which time Jerusalem has been under Gentile overlordship. <sup>19</sup>	The “times of the Gentiles” began with the captivity of Judah under Nebuchadnezzar. Since that time Jerusalem has been, as Christ said, “trampled on by the Gentiles” <sup>20</sup>

Frankly, even with the benefit of hindsight, this is a rather weak basis for believing there will be a future ‘restoration’ of Jewish sovereignty over Jerusalem. Revelation 11:2 says that the Gentile ‘trampling’ of Jerusalem would continue for only ‘42 months’. If we take this literally as meaning three and a half years, dating this event is somewhat problematic. Is it past, present or future? Perhaps it’s not surprising that Scofield does not link this passage to Jesus’ prophecy! It is far more likely, as the TNIV Study Bible suggests, that the ‘times of the Gentiles’ is “a conventional symbol for a limited period of time of unrestrained wickedness.”<sup>21</sup> If you re-read the context of Luke 21:24 again you will see that in the preceding verses and even the first part

<sup>17</sup> Hal Lindsey, *The Final Battle*, (Palos Verdes, California, Western Front, 1995), p. 95.

<sup>18</sup> Mike Evans, *Jerusalem Betrayed, Ancient Prophecy and Modern Conspiracy Collide in the Holy City* (Dallas, Word, 1997), p. 193.

<sup>19</sup> Scofield, *Scofield*, op.cit., fn. 2, p.1106.

<sup>20</sup> E. Schuyler English, *The New Scofield Study Bible*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 1084. Schuyler English does the same thing in a footnote to Revelation 16:19.

<sup>21</sup> *Today’s New International Study Bible*, Kenneth Barker ed. (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2006) p. 2133

of verse 24 Jesus is still referring to events that occurred in 70AD. In verses 25-27 Jesus specifies cataclysmic events that will be associated with his return. In verse 28 Jesus gives encouragement to his followers referring to 'your redemption' not to any 'redemption' of unbelieving Jerusalem.<sup>22</sup> It is therefore perhaps far wiser to follow commentators like Norval Geldenhuys, who suggest that the 'times of the Gentiles' will not be fulfilled "until the end of this present world-order when Christ will come with divine majesty and power to establish His eternal kingdom on the new earth after the Final Judgement (cf. verses 25-33)"<sup>23</sup> Colin Chapman suggests an even simpler interpretation – that the 'times of the Gentiles' just means 'the time allowed to the Romans'.<sup>24</sup> In this sense, Jesus' words are a warning against Jewish pride in their city as much as Gentile arrogance in their military power. Both will be humbled on the day of judgement. It is also significant that Jesus uses the word 'trampled' to describe the effect of Gentile control. It's a word God uses repeatedly to describe his judgement in one of the prophecies of Isaiah.

I have *trodden* the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I *trampled* them in my anger and *trod* them down in my wrath... It was for me the day of vengeance; the year for me to redeem had come... I *trampled* the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground. (Isaiah 63:3-6)

If this is the context for Jesus' words, then we learn from Isaiah that even the most powerful of human tyrants and empires are subject to God's sovereign will and in some mysterious way fulfil his purposes and judgements. Jesus' statement in Luke 21:24 was therefore not intended to fuel 'End Time' speculation but rather to encourage sober reflection on how we should live in the light of God's sovereign rule and judgement. In his death and resurrection, Jesus has brought redemption and restoration to all Jews and Gentiles who trust and believe in him. As Peter Walker observes,

As for the future of Jerusalem, the Apocalyptic Discourse revealed that at the End, the central focus would not be upon Jerusalem, but rather upon the Son of Man... if there was any connection with Jerusalem, it consisted in the fact that the End would be modelled typologically upon Jerusalem's destruction. The 'restoration' was of Jesus, not of Jerusalem.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Peter Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1996), p. 101.

<sup>23</sup> Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (London, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1950), p. 528.

<sup>24</sup> Chapman, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>25</sup> Walker, op. cit., p. 102.

The challenge the Apostles faced was proclaiming this good news among the very people who had crucified Christ. Despite the brutal power of the Roman occupation, the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem continued to exert immense influence over the Jews living throughout the Roman world. This tension spilled over into the early Church. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul criticizes the legalists who had come from Jerusalem and who were infecting the Church in Galatia with their mixture of law and grace and emphasis on circumcision. It appears they placed an undue emphasis on the significance of Jerusalem in determining Christian orthodoxy. As we have already seen, Paul is not impressed, comparing Jerusalem with Hagar and slavery rather than Sarah and the freedom found in the gospel. Instead he pointed to another more important Jerusalem.

### **The Jerusalem Above**

But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written: *‘Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labour pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.’*” (Galatians 4:26-27 – Isaiah 54:1)

In Galatians 4:27 Paul is quoting from Isaiah 54:1 which refers to the earthly Jerusalem. But Paul now interprets this passage as referring to the new Jerusalem, the home of all who believe in Jesus Christ, and no longer associated with the capital of Israel.<sup>26</sup> J.C. De Young writes,

Gal. 4:21 ff. represents, perhaps, the sharpest polemic against Jerusalem in the New Testament... Far from being pre-occupied with hopes for a glorification of the earthly Jerusalem, Paul’s thought represents a most emphatic repudiation of any eschatological hopes concerning the earthly city.<sup>27</sup>

The Apostle John reaches the same conclusion in the Book of Revelation. Here, Jerusalem becomes “figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.” (Revelation 11:8). The Jerusalem that crucified Jesus Christ at Passover; rejected the signs and wonders of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; repudiated the message of the Apostles; executed Stephen and James; tried to assassinate Paul; and instigated ‘a great persecution... against the church’ (Acts 8:2), has now become

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1 <sup>26</sup> Peter Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1996). p. 131.

2 <sup>27</sup>J. C. De Young, *Jerusalem in the New Testament* (Amsterdam: J.H. Kok/N.V. Kampen 1961), p. 106. Cited in Walker, *Jesus.*, p. 131.

associated with the immorality of Sodom and the oppression of Egypt. The status of Jerusalem has changed irrevocably. From now on the earthly Jerusalem will be associated not with the Patriarchs or with David or with the Temple of Solomon or Herod but with a simple wooden cross and an empty tomb. "The coming of Jesus has been its undoing."<sup>28</sup> And here is at last a hint of the 'good news' about Jerusalem in the New Testament.

The good news about Jerusalem has to do with all that Jesus accomplished there. Peter Walker observes:

It is Jesus himself... who gives us the warrant to view Jerusalem in an entirely new light... Jerusalem could never be the same again, now that Jesus had come... Jesus, not Jerusalem, would now become the central 'place' within God's purposes, the place around which God's true people would be gathered.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Heavenly Jerusalem**

The focus of the New Testament shifts away from an earthly onto a heavenly Jerusalem which by faith in Jesus, we are already citizens. So, in Hebrews, for example, Christ followers are promised residency in the heavenly Jerusalem.

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. (Hebrews 12:22-23)

Access to heaven no longer has anything to do with earthly Jerusalem. Jesus began to reveal this change in his conversation with a woman of Samaria.

Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. (John 4:21-23)

### **The New Jerusalem**

It is true that some verses of the Old Testament can be interpreted as suggesting Jerusalem would be an exclusive city, reserved for one race, the Jewish people. For

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<sup>28</sup> Walker, *Jesus.*, op.cit., p. 320.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Walker, 'Jesus and Jerusalem: New Testament Perspectives' in Naim Ateek, Cedar Duaybis and Maria Schrader, eds, *Jerusalem: What Makes for Peace!* (London, Melesende, 1997), pp. 62, 66, 67.

example, Isaiah refers to Jerusalem as a 'holy city' in which "The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again." (Isaiah 52:1)

However, this is most likely a reference to foreign invaders. By contrast, the image of Jerusalem found in the New Testament, is of a new inclusive city built by God, coming down from heaven - one in which there is no darkness – and where the gates are never shut but open to people of all nations.

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband... I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 21:2, 22-26).

In this one all consuming vision, God's people now embrace all peoples, God's land encompasses all nations, and God's holy city has become the eternal dwelling place of all who remain faithful - the Bride of Christ, the wife of the Lamb (Revelation 21:9). And what of the Temple? John writes, "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." (Revelation 21:22). And yet it is here that the contradiction between the flow of New Testament revelation and the Zionist agenda is most sharply brought into focus. The expectation of a future Jewish Temple is probably the most controversial issue uniting Jewish Zionists and their Christian friends – and the subject of our next chapter.

### **Chapter Summary Points**

1. Many Christian Zionists defend and justify Israel's annexation of Jerusalem claiming it is the eternal, undivided and exclusive capital of the Jews.
2. Jerusalem became the capital of Israel briefly under David and Solomon before its decline following the disintegration of tribal alliances and their eventual exile.
3. The Old Testament vision of Jerusalem enjoying God's blessing is of an international and inclusive city of faith, justice and holiness.
4. Jerusalem in the New Testament is associated not with Israel, the Jews or the Temple, but with Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection.

5. The end of the 'times of the Gentiles' far from being a sign of Jewish national sovereignty more likely points to the return of Jesus.
6. The Jerusalem that rejected Jesus and his followers is associated with the immorality of Sodom and oppression of Egypt in the Book of Revelation.
7. Christians look instead to a heavenly Jerusalem as their spiritual home.

### **Passages to Review**

2 Samuel 6:1-19; Psalm 87; Isaiah 2:3-5; 63:3-6; Jeremiah 7:1-11; 21:3-10; Micah 3:9-12; Matthew 23:37-39; Luke 13:34-35; 19:41-44; 21:20-28; John 4:21-23; Galatians 4:21-31; Hebrew 12:18-29; Revelation 21:1-27.

### **Questions for Further Study**

1. What role does Jerusalem fulfil in the purposes of God?
2. Why did the Prophets criticize the people of Jerusalem?
3. How did the coming of Jesus redefine the role of Jerusalem?
4. Why did Jesus weep over Jerusalem?
5. How should we interpret the 'times of the Gentiles' in Luke 21:24?
6. What do we learn about the 'New Jerusalem' from Psalm 87, Isaiah 2 and Revelation 21?
7. How should we pray for the peace of Jerusalem today?