

Two kinds of Cities

In our meditation on 'Come up hither', we were invited with Apostle John to come up to the heavenly position to see two separate developments emerging from the same holy beginning. A key to understanding these meditations is to have in mind that the seven letters John wrote to the churches relate directly to the developments we find in the book of Revelation as from the fourth chapter.

The things that Jesus said in the letters that were either commendations or condemnation from the main emphasis in these teachings. The Lord encourages us to take note of the things that give Him satisfaction. We are to cultivate these virtues. The Lord calls to repentance from those things that He condemns. Obedience leads to glory. Disobedience brings shame and destruction. From chapter four onwards, we are able to trace the paths of obedience and disobedience. In two contrasting sets of word-pictures, we are shown what the history of obedience will lead to, and what things the course of disobedience brings.

So, in considering the subject: 'TWO KINDS OF CITIES', recall that the first is the direct result of faithfulness. This city is discussed in Revelation 21. The other City develops from unfaithfulness and it is discussed in Revelation 18. The faithful class of believers is called the 'Holy City', the New Jerusalem, while the unfaithful is called 'Babylon', the Great City.

There are two common features in all seven letters Apostle John wrote to the churches. The first feature is that the letters are addressed to the churches, through the leadership in each of the church type.

So God speaks to all His children in each of the letters. The second feature is that the promise is made to individuals who overcome. For example, in Revelation 2:7, we find the phrase "to him that overcomes", not "to them that overcome", but "to him that overcomes".

This bring to mind some important things that may be inferred from these two features:

1. God is concerned about the local assembly of His people. He is concerned about the local church.

2. But the emphasis in judgement is that we are judged as individuals, not as groups. "To him that overcomes". Each man stands alone before the judgement seat of Christ.

Now, why does God write to the whole church and then make promises to the individual who is overcoming? It is because the spiritual environments in which we are fellowshiping tend to have influence upon our walk with God. If the set-up is faulty, no matter how desirous the individual is to walk in faithfulness before God, being not helped by his environment, he might be greatly disadvantaged. In addition, the spiritual influences in the assembly will impact on him either for good or for evil.

So, the proper functioning of the local assembly is something the Lord emphasises on in the New Testament scriptures. In the book, "God's Pattern Church", which will soon be in print, we are able to look into this matter fully. It examines God's mind for His church and the principles in the word that should inform how the local church operates. A great need of the hour is to have local assemblies of believers operating after the due order. What we see in the streets of religion are mainly church organisations that are doing their own thing.

So, it is as individuals that we are judged. Our salvation and subsequent development into full Sonship is an individual matter. We cannot say this is what our church is doing, but rather this is what I perceive the Lord will have me do (follow). Our prayer is that all of the Lord's people, and particularly those who take leadership responsibilities in the various assemblies, should submit to the great changes God is calling for in this last hour. We must set aside the rule of the flesh and man's by-laws, and embrace the rule of the Spirit and of the Word.

Let's return our minds to the main stream of our meditation. Coming

to our place on the heavenly watchtower we are made to see two kinds of cities. We would begin with the Holy City also referred to as the

New Jerusalem. When we talk about the New Jerusalem, it is important for us to understand that this city is not a natural sphere. When people take up discussions on the glories of the celestial realm, the abode of God, the heavens that our full-grown Spirits would operate in, the thought expressed is that Revelation 21

describes a physical sphere called heaven. So men have said that when you get to the heaven of God, the street is made of gold etc. The Holy City is a people. The beauties and glories revealed in Revelation chapter 21 relates to spiritual realities Christ is developing in His people who are obedient. In the term "City" as used throughout the book of Revelation, a body of people with clearly

defined characteristics is meant. A reference to Revelation chapter

17:18 will confirm what has just been noted. The harlot woman is a City, Babylon. We read, "And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth".

The woman is a city. This is important. When we come to Revelation 21:2, we find John saying in relation to the faithful City,

"And I John saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Here again, the City is said to be a woman, the bride. The Lamb's wife is a City, the Holy City. The Lamb's wife in the finished picture is the faithful church. And in verses 9 and 10, we still find an invitation to John saying, "Come up hither, and I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife". Verse 10 says he was carried to an exceedingly high mountain and from that position, he was shown the Holy City, coming out of heaven from God.

So, it is important to know that the Cities that we are talking about speak of a people, not the landmass, nor some physical, concrete structure, but a people. Now, you know that song, "try a little kindness or show a little kindness, shine your light for everyone to see". At some point in the song, it says "the city soul" or "the

city of the soul". So, we are talking about the inward man. Our spiritual man is here presented in the figure of a city. And of course, what is true for the individual is true for the whole assemblies of God's people. The individual believer is a city in the same way the church as a body is figured as a city. If we submit to God's dealings with us in Christ there is developed in us the graces of the Spirit that are graphically described in Revelation 21.

Now, let us take note of something specific about each of the two Cities. In Revelation 18, the emphasis in the description of the harlot system is on its greatness. It is called the great city.

But when you come to Revelation 21, the emphasis in the description of the faithful city is on its holiness of character and life. It is called the Holy City. This is important.

We will like to take some few verses from Revelation 18, looking more closely at the harlot City, Babylon. Our emphasis in this meditation will be on the unfaithful city. So, come with me to Revelation 18:1-4.

"And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power: and the earth was lightened with his glory.

And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the Kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."

We may want to sum up three things taken from Revelation 18 that describes the unfaithful city.

First of all, the City is called "Babylon". What does Babylon mean?

The root word is "Babel" . Babel means the gate to God or an entrance into the things of God. That which leads to God is Babel.

Reading Genesis 11:9, you find that word Babel. The context is the story of the Tower of Babel. Now, of course you understand what the

tower of Babel was. It is not actually a physical tower that was being built which top was to reach the sky. It suffices for our present purpose to note that Babel means the gate to God, an entrance

to God. That which starts out as a means of leading people to God is

Babel. But not everything we see comes out to be exactly what it is given to be.

Babylon means "confusion". Considering this together with the meaning of the root word Babel, we come to understand what the word "Babylon" denotes. That which presents itself as God's vessel professing to show the nations the way of the true worship of God is

actually in opposition to divine interests. There is that which presents itself as the gate to God but which in essence leads away the unsuspecting from Him. This is confusion. Man's city is built when God's purposes are set aside.

A spiritual movement degenerates into a denomination when men usurp God's authority in His church. In the bid to become great, many servants of God have dethroned Him in their lives. It is subtle in its workings but ambition is behind the many deviations from the path

of truth of these men. By the very way things are conducted in many

assemblies, God's purposes are beclouded, and made vague. The sincere labours of the people are by men converted to serve their selfish interests. So, Babylon is confusion, while Babel, the root word from which it is derived means, the gate to God. This is the first important observation that we are making, drawn from Revelation

18.

The second is that This City is called "Babylon, the great". Remember that there was once a Kingdom named Babylon, which existed about six hundred years before the first advent of Christ. This is the empire over which Nebuchadnezer reigned. But, in saying the city is 'Babylon, the great', there are two things that the scripture is alluding to.

The first is that there are certain things about this spiritual City that we can understand as we look again at the ancient Babylonian Empire. Of course, we know that Revelation 18 is not referring to a geographical location in Baghdad but to something spiritual. There is a parallel between that physical, historical City and this spiritual anti-type. Secondly, the word 'great' is a reference to the fact that it is the one thing that motivates the people. That is, the people of the city are driven by a lust for greatness. They want to be seen; they want to be great and reckoned as such. Babylon of old, its people and nobles were known for vanity. This also is true of spiritual Babylon.

God's Word recommends a humble carriage for believers, more so, those who are ministers of His. Humility thrives on the ruins of self-life. The death-to-self message is the way of the cross. "Take up your cross and follow me", is the cry of the Master. But many see such an image as not satisfying their inward cravings.

So, the thirst for greatness, the thirst for fame, the thirst for popularity make people to go into all kinds of things in order to be seen and known of men to be great. This is in contrast to what we see of the faithful City. The telling characteristic of the faithful City is its holiness. Holiness first of all means separation from the world, and then the use to which that which is separated is put.

So the Holy City is the city that is separate from the world and serving the Lord's purpose alone. In Numbers chapter 23:9, it is said of the Lord's people that they shall dwell alone, they shall not

be reckoned among the nations. So, the church is supposed to stand alone, apart from the rest of the world, being God's means of ministering His salvation to the ends of the earth. This is important.

So, the thirst for greatness is a characteristic feature of the unfaithful City. Remember the words to the Laodecian church, "I am rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing." The very description of these riches is spelt out in Revelation chapter 18:12.

So, the thirst is for greatness. And sometimes, people resort to all kinds of evil things to become great. People build some great structures and great organisations. Quite often, the church is run like a multi-national company with the General Manager like a demi-god, a tin god.

Achievements in Christendom are measured by how many branches and congregations a church has; how many vehicles and other assets, who was the first to use the television in ministry, to buy a private jet, who has the highest number of branches overseas and so on.

But

we know from a true understanding of the scriptures that God has not

called us to be like Nimrod who wanted to have all of the nations under his control (Genesis 10:8-12). God has not called us to be demigods. Rather, God has called us to be servants of His and to be

in fellowship with one another. And no one ought to carry himself above the rest of his brethren. That is the second observation we are making concerning these few verses we have read.

The third observation is found in the third verse. A command is given saying, "come out of her my people". Since Babylon is not a physical location, but a spiritual condition, then it follows that some of God's people, especially at the time of the end, shall be found in such a state. This being so, each of us need to examine the

substance of this command. We must know what things in life and service the Lord reacts against and deliver ourselves from them.

It

will always call for deep repentance. Quite often, it will include separation.

However, remember that Babylon is not physical location. In fact, in the New Testament, Paul writes and sends greetings to the church

in Babylon. That, that Babylon referred to is today a city in Iraq, sixty-five kilometres from Baghdad only blind our eyes to what God is saying to His people. A church was planted there many years back, but the Babylon in Revelation 18 is not the physical city. God is not angry at some geographical location called Babylon. But there are certain elements which when found in an Assembly of God's people or in an individual identifies such with the concept called Babylon.

The visible church system presents itself to the world as God's mouthpiece to proclaim His Word to the people. But the very way things are carried on in many places is contrary to God's purpose. As we look to these elements, let us begin to earnestly search our spirits. To whatever extent these traits are found in us, to that same extent we should seek deliverance. May the Lord make us humble enough to turn from wickedness. May we allow God to do the work of perfection in us. It is written, "He shall see the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied". What a joy to become a satisfaction to so great a Saviour. So, these are the three elements.

Now, we go straight to Revelation 21 to make a similar survey. Three things are set out in the chapter that helps us to understand its main lessons. First, the walls are described. Secondly, the gate to the City is described. Thirdly, the City itself is described, the prominent feature being its street. In the wall, the emphasis is on character, those attributes of character that are found in Jesus. Then, in the garnishing of the foundations of the wall, the emphasis is on the attributes of wisdom; the wisdom that was found so fully developed in Jesus. And when talking of wisdom, we mean wisdom with all its critical faculties, as including prudence, knowledge, understanding and such other things.

Coming to the gates. Notice that the word 'gates' is plural. The gates of the City speak of ministries raised up within the church that makes possible for there to be an admission of some into the things of God and a locking out of others from the things of God.

They who enter in by the gates ultimately find their lives becoming more and more like God. Those who are kept back do not meet the required standard. Christ fully manifested in us is the righteousness of the law fulfilled. This is the standard.

In Revelation 21:24-27, we read concerning the faithful City:

"And the nations of them, which are saved, shall walk in the light of it, and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."

In closing, let us observe that 'City' in scriptures also denotes administration, government. Remember Psalm 48:1-2: "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised, in the City of our God, in the mountain of His holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, the sides of the north, the City of the great king." So, the word 'City' should bring to our mind government, administration. Here in Psalm 48:1-2, it is shown the joy, peace and gladness, which the administration of God's kingdom shall bring upon the nations of the earth. In the picture of the unfaithful City (Babylon, the great), we are shown how there is developed over the course of time, a false administration which claims to represent God but patterns itself more and more like the secular world. In the picture of the faithful City, the Holy City, we are shown the gradual emergence of a true spiritual administration (government) that patterns itself more and more according to the provisions in God's Word.

These are the things we are seeing in a contrast. And, we have run through in order to give us a general introduction. When you see the detailed description of the faithful City in Revelation 21, you will know that the Lord Jesus Christ wants to carry out such great work

in

our lives. In the main, the local assemblies of God's people are just playing church. When we consider any one aspect of the great work the Lord wants to do in our lives, it is seen how far removed from the finished picture we are at the moment. The Christian calling is a serious business. We need to humble ourselves to be thoroughly focused on Him at all times. Thank God, here and there we

see the springing up of a new hunger for God among His people. Truly, the restoration has begun. May the Lord bless and keep you, and make His face to shine upon you.

Beloved Brethren, this far has the Lord by His Spirit helped us today

and until some other time when He brings us your way again, stay blessedly blessed in Him. Our next consideration shall be "TWO KINDS

OF STREETS" - We earnestly covet your prayers.