

Jerusalem in Prophecy

Randall Price

Jerusalem occupies a chosen place in the divine plan of the ages, being distinguished as such in the praise of the Psalmist: “The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than the dwelling places of Jacob” (Psalm 87:2). Moreover, it is this city alone to which God descended, as the Psalmist again declared: “For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. This is My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it” (Psalm 132:13-14). Consequently, Jerusalem attained a status as both the holy city and as the city at the center of the world (Ezekiel 5:5). Given such privileged position, it is no wonder that Jerusalem is mentioned more than any other city in Scripture: more than 800 times (660 verses in the Old Testament and 142), and appears in some two-thirds of the books of the Old and almost one-half of the books of the New Testament. While Jerusalem is its most common appellation, it also occurs under other names such as Zion, Salem, and Ariel, as well as symbolically in allegory as “Hagar and Mount Sinai in Arabia” (Galatians 4:25) and in prophecy as “Sodom and Egypt” (Revelation 11:8). Of the biblical references, 465 in the Old Testament and 24 in the New refer to prophecies of Jerusalem subsequent to the time of their utterances.

In the Bible Jerusalem occupies a strategic position with respect to two major prophetic periods: “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24) and “the seventy weeks of Daniel” (Daniel 9:24-27). In the case of “the times of the Gentiles,” the city prophetically marks the beginning and ending of this period that stretches from the Babylonian destruction (587 B.C.) until the Second Advent of Christ. In the case of the “seventy weeks,” events in Jerusalem likewise determine the beginning and ending of this prophetic period as well as affecting the parenthesis in time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week. During the time of the First Temple, Jerusalem became the focal point of prophecy as foreign invaders sought to capture the holy city. At one such occasion the prophet Isaiah prophesied Jerusalem’s deliverance while declaring God’s covenantal pledge to preserve it for the future: “For I will defend this city to save it for My own sake and for My servant David’s sake” (2 Kings 19:34).

Jerusalem is at the heart of messianic prophecy and redemptive history. In fact, it may be said that there could have been no such plan revealed apart from its presence (Luke 13:33b). Jerusalem was indispensable to the preparation of Christ’s first coming, being restored from ruin (Isaiah 52:7-12) to fulfill its role in the messianic advent as the city of the great king. Indeed, Jesus was sent to Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37) and the city served to mark defining moments in Jesus earthly life and ministry: dedication (Luke 2:22-38), dialogue with the teachers in the Temple (Luke 2:41-49), temptation by the devil (Luke 4:9-12), confrontation with the money-changers (Matthew 21:12-27), signs of messiahship (John 5:19; 7:14-29; 8:2-12), trial and crucifixion (Matthew 25-27), resurrection and ascension (Luke 24:1-51; Acts 1:9-11). Following this pattern and Jesus command that the witness to the nations begin in Jerusalem, the Church began in the city (Acts 2:1-13), the apostles performed miracles there (Acts 3), the Jerusalem Council met there (Acts 15:2-29), and from there Paul began his climatic trip to Damascus (Acts 9:1-6) and later experienced the conflict that lead to his imprisonment and death (Acts 21:27ff).

Jerusalem’s destruction in A.D. 70 by the Roman Tenth Legion was predicted as the result of its rejection of Jesus and its persecution of the Church: “and they will not leave in you one stone upon

another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation” (Luke 19:44). Yet, Jesus’ prediction included the future hope of Jerusalem’s restoration when it repents and receives Him as Messiah (Matthew 23:39; Acts 3:19-21) at the Second Advent. Jesus even revealed the duration of its desolation, being “trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). Thus, Jerusalem’s experience as the time of the end approaches is to be one of escalating tribulation until it becomes the Tribulation period and finally finds deliverance at Christ’s coming (Matthew 24:21-31).

According to Daniel’s prophecy of the seventieth week (Daniel 9:27), which informs Jesus’ prophetic discourse on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), Paul’s prophetic instruction to the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 2:4), and John’s prophetic vision of the city’s invasion by the nations (Revelation 11:1-2), the armies of the Antichrist will occupy the city (cf. Daniel 11:45), desecrate the Temple and usurp the place of God within it, demanding worship from the world (cf. Revelation 13:6, 15).

Zechariah’s prophecy prominently chronicles this period of distress for the city, detailing the gathering of all nations against Jerusalem (Zechariah 12:2-3; 14:2) and its battles until at the climax of the campaign of Armageddon, when the final assault on Jerusalem takes place (Zechariah 12-14). The Lord will bring about Israel’s national repentance beginning with “the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Zechariah 12:8-13:2), Christ will defeat the invading armies of Antichrist (Zechariah 14:3, 12-15), deliver the Jewish Remnant in the city by an earthquake (Zechariah 14:3-4), and there set up His Millennial reign (Zechariah 14:9), transforming the city’s topography (Zechariah 14:8, 10) rebuilding the Temple (Zechariah 6:12-15), purifying and glorifying the city (Zechariah 8:3; 14:11, 20-21; cf. Isaiah 4:5-6; Jeremiah 3:17), and calling the nations to worship Him (Zechariah 14:16-19).

Isaiah, likewise, prophesies concerning Jerusalem in the Millennial Kingdom, declaring the elevation of the Temple Mount and its new position as the worship center for the world (Isaiah 2:2-3) and center of Messiah’s rule over the nations, establishing universal peace (Isaiah 2:4). Isaiah also reveals the glorious reversal of Jerusalem’s fortunes in the millennial restoration, announcing the predicted fulfillment for the city with the divine declaration: “For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing, and her people for gladness. I will also rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in My people” (Isaiah 65:18). The prophet’s portrayal of restoration in Jerusalem includes a restoration of harmony in the created order to prevent the defiling “[God’s] holy mountain” in Jerusalem (Isaiah 11:6-9; 65:25), and the nations turning to Christ, becoming His people (Isaiah 11:10, 12; 19:25) and beholding His glory in Jerusalem (Isaiah 66:18-20).

The prophet Ezekiel focuses on Jerusalem’s Millennial Temple and the city’s extended sacred status (Ezekiel 40-48), depicting the Lord’s return to dwell in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 43:1-7; cf. 37:26-28) and conferring upon it a new descriptive title: “YHWH Shammah: The Lord is there” (Ezekiel 48:35).

The final assault on the city is predicted to occur at the conclusion of the thousand year reign of Christ when Satan, released from his imprisonment deceives the nations and gathers an army to march against King Messiah enthroned in Jerusalem (Revelation 20:7-9a). As He had promised (2 Kings 19:34), the Lord defends Jerusalem and destroys these last adversaries of His holy city (Revelation 20:9b).

With the creation of the new heavens and new earth for the eternal state, apparently an earthly Jerusalem will continue in relationship to the heavenly Jerusalem in fulfillment of its divine destiny as the place where God's Name will remain forever (2 Chronicles 33:4; cf. Psalm 48:8; 68:16; 132:14 Joel 3:20; Micah 4:7). In light of the position Jerusalem holds in the prophetic program, and how that for which the world hopes rests on its fulfillment, let us heed the command of the Psalmist to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Psalm 122:6).

Bibliography

Randall Price, *Jerusalem in Prophecy* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1998), Harold D. Foos, "Jerusalem in Prophecy" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1965), "Jerusalem in Biblical Prophecy," *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*. Ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996): 207-210, Dave Hunt, *A Cup of Trembling* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1958), Arnold Olsen, *Inside Jeruusalem, City of Destiny* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books/Gospel Light Publications, 1969), Arnold Fructenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*. Revised & enlarged edition (Tustin, CA: Ariel Press, 2004).