

Not In Jerusalem!

By

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The conversation Jesus had with the woman at the well at Sychar in Samaria has been memorialized in sermon and song. But one significant statement He made is generally overlooked. He said.

“Woman, believe me, the hour comes when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father” (John 4.21).

He went on to say that true worshippers shall worship the Father “in spirit and in truth” (Vs 23), and many strongly emphasize this statement. However, His statement in verse 21 doesn’t seem to have registered with most people in the churches, as they continue to idolize Jerusalem as “The Holly City,” and hanker to visit “The Holy Land,” and see the “sacred” places.

While Jerusalem was indeed the special city of God under the economy of the Mosaic Law, the prophets did not hesitate to reveal that it was to come under severe condemnation and to be supplanted by something greater and better, as revealed in the 16th chapter of Ezekiel. In fact, it was Moses himself who predicted that the nation would fall into disobedience, and in the 28th Chapter of Deuteronomy he detailed the fearful consequences that Jerusalem would suffer in its destruction.

The message of Moses accords with the words of Jesus after He exposed the gross wickedness of the religious leaders in Jerusalem: “Fill up then the measure of your fathers...Behold your house is left unto you desolate...” (Matt. 23:32, 39).

The account of Jesus as He moved among the Jews is the account of Jewish rejection of God’s Son and God’s holy purpose. E. E. Gordon notes a seven-fold repudiation of Jesus by the Jews: John 4:14; 7:11, 8:2, 59; 10:23; 11:53, 56-57; 12:36; 16:3.

In His discourse on the Mount of Olives Jesus echoes the prophecy of Moses in declaring that the buildings of the temple would be destroyed: “There shall not be left here one stone upon another.” The city would undergo a period of tribulation which had never been heard of before (Matt. 24.2, 21).

In the Gospel accounts there is nothing to indicate that Jesus ever held the city of Jerusalem in high regard. Rather, it was treated either with contempt or pity,” never as worthy or sacred. During His public ministry the record shows Jesus returning to Bethany each night, rather than spending a night in Jerusalem. He completely ignored it in choosing the apostles. Eleven of them were Galileans, and Judas was a Judean,” but not of Jerusalem.

In parable after parable Jesus showed that the rulers of Jerusalem were under God's wrath and would soon be judged. In the parable of the vineyard (Matt. 21:33-46), He described how the husbandmen had beaten the tenants and killed the son of the owner. It is clear that the servants represented the prophets, and the son represented God's son. The wicked husbandmen were the Jews themselves, to whom Jesus said, "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (Vs.43). The chief priests and Pharisees "perceived that he spoke of them" but were afraid to take him, because they feared the multitude.

The city of Jerusalem was never held in awe or reverence by the apostles, according to the Biblical account. After the resurrection Jesus told them to "tarry in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 21:17-19). That power came on the Day of Pentecost, after which the apostles scattered all over the empire, and probably to nations far beyond. Jerusalem became the place for Christians to avoid by the arrest of Peter and John (Acts 3), the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7), the martyrdom of James and arrest of Peter (Acts 12), and finally the arrest of Paul (Acts 21).

As the Jerusalem Christians were persecuted, and many had to flee for their lives. They could be grateful that Jesus had revealed that such a time would come when Jerusalem would no longer be the center of worship, that they could worship in any place and at any time in spirit and truth.

In the last recorded words of the apostle Paul he quoted Isaiah, in the denunciation of the Jews for their hard-hearted rebellion, and concluded: "Be it known therefore unto you, that this salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles (nations); they will also hear" (Acts 28:28). Judea and its capital city were no longer to be special places for the work of God, and the city was soon to suffer the fiery destruction that came in 70 AD. There was never any promise, not even a hint, of its restoration.

Writing on this subject, Joseph M. Canfield says, "We submit that when the Lord had Jerusalem destroyed in AD 70, He wanted it to remain so throughout the Church Age." He writes that the non-existence of the city would be in compliance with the words of Jesus: "Your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. 23:2). Of course disobedience didn't end with the end of the city.*

The first attempt at rebuilding it was in 131 AD, under Emperor Hadrian, who renamed it "Aelia Capitolia," a pagan name. It has never been a Christian center since 70 AD.

The Crusades were based on the erroneous idea that Jerusalem was a "holy city" and worthy of any sacrifice made to wrest it from the hands of the "infidels" in order to place the emblems of Christian faith there. The Crusades were a disaster and a terrible disgrace to the name of Christ. Both Arab and Christian lives were lost by the thousands. Disease and famine followed as the normal result of medieval warfare. Women were raped and villages pillaged by the Crusaders. Thousands of children who zealously followed the foolish leaders in the "Children's Crusade" lost their lives through starvation and

exposure. Such is the record of the attempt to make holy a city that was considered by God to be an abomination.

In the early days of the church a question arose about accepting the uncircumcised Gentiles. A council of apostles and elders was called (Acts 15) at which James cited the words of the prophet Amos about building again the tabernacle of David. James applied this prophecy to the spread of the gospel, showing that the prophecy had to do with the spiritual household of God, and not the building of a material structure.

This is in accord with the apostles' teaching that each Christian is a temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16-17). For God dwells not in temples made with hands (Acts 17:24).

True worship is a matter of the heart and mind – in spirit and in truth – and not a matter of geographical location, nor material environment. As the Jews built bigger and bigger structures for worship, they grew farther away from the object of worship until He finally brought judgment upon the nation. (Could the same thing be happening today as the focus is on bigger and bigger church buildings, with vast treasures being invested in them, while evangelism and benevolence are largely neglected?)

Both prophets and apostles, and Jesus Himself, held Jerusalem and the land of Israel to be under a curse. Jews who control modern Israel are not descendants of Israel, but a people who adopted Talmudist and/or Kabalism, and call it Judaism. They use the gullible Christian's belief in a "Holy Land" to advance their political schemes, which are the cause of the violence and turmoil in the Middle East.

A trip to Jerusalem might be interesting, but it cannot draw a Christian closer to God who already abides in the true believer. The money spent on such trips might better be spent on endeavors that fulfill the commands of Jesus and glorify the Father.

The Hebrew author writes that we (believers) have "come to Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem..." (Heb. 12:22). The holy city, New Jerusalem, mentioned in Revelation 21, is not the Jerusalem of Palestine, but a portrayal of the entire body of all the redeemed of all ages, in a city that transcends the limitations of the present earth.

The words still apply "when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father."

We do well to cease paying honor to a corrupt city of unbelievers and give that honor to Jesus, who instructed us to worship in spirit and truth.

* From article by Joseph M. Canfield, "Neither City Nor Land Are Holy:" in *Journal For Projects In Eschatology*, Vol. 3, Nov/Dec 1997.

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