

Transformation

As we have shown in a previous article (see “The New Jerusalem—A Corporate Person,” *Affirmation & Critique* V.2 (April 2000): 45-65), the New Jerusalem is not a literal, physical city. It is not heaven or a place of heavenly mansions. The New Jerusalem, as the conclusion of the entire Bible, is a sign, even the greatest and ultimate sign in the Scriptures. According to Revelation 1:1, the book of Revelation is a book of signs—symbols with spiritual significance—through which the apostle John made the revelation of Christ known to His slaves. The New Jerusalem is the last and consummate sign in this book and in the entire Bible, and every detail of the description of the New Jerusalem is a sign (chs. 21—22).

An Organic Constitution

As a whole, the New Jerusalem signifies an organic constitution of the processed and consummated Triune God with His redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified tripartite elect. As such, it is the mingling of the Triune God with all His redeemed throughout the ages. Such an organic constitution can be seen in the structure of the New Jerusalem, which consists of the city proper with its street, the gates, and the wall with its foundations. The city proper and its street are pure gold (21:18, 21), signifying God the Father with His divine life and divine nature. The gates are pearl (v. 21), signifying the produce of God the Son in His redeeming and life-releasing death and His life-dispensing resurrection. The wall and its foundations are twelve kinds of precious stones (vv. 18-20), signifying God the Spirit with His work of transformation and building. Thus, the Triune God Himself is the basic material for the construction of the New Jerusalem. On the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are inscribed (v. 12), indicating that the holy city includes all the redeemed saints of the Old Testament. Furthermore, the twelve foundations bear the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (v. 14), indicating that the New Jerusalem incorporates not only the Old Testament saints, represented by Israel, but also the New Testament saints, represented by the apostles. In the New Jerusalem these two parties—the processed and consummated Triune God and His chosen and redeemed people throughout the ages—are constituted together by being united, mingled, and incorporated together to be one entity.

In the New Jerusalem the mingling of God and man is seen particularly in the number twelve, a number used repeatedly in the description of the holy city (vv. 12, 14, 16-17, 19-21; 22:2). Concerning this number Watchman Nee writes in *The Glorious Church*:

Twelve is the number used in eternity... Since God is the Triune God, the number three represents God, while four is the number which represents creation, such as the four winds, the four seasons, and the four living creatures. When three is added to four, it means that God is added to man. How complete and perfect it is to have the Creator plus the creature! But anything which is added can also be subtracted and thereby lost again; so this completion is not a lasting one. But in the New Jerusalem, the union of God and man is no longer seven, but twelve. It is no longer three plus four, but three multiplied by four. Multiplication is a perfect union, something which can never be separated. When the Creator mingles with the creature it is twelve, and twelve is the number of perfect union. In the new heaven and new earth, God and man will become one, and God and man can no longer be separated. (132)

The Embodiment of God's Full Salvation

As an organic constitution of divinity and humanity, the New Jerusalem is the embodiment of God's full salvation, including its judicial and organic aspects (Rom. 5:10). All the aspects of God's salvation can be seen in it. Redemption can be seen in the Lamb (Rev. 22:1); regeneration, in the gates of pearl (21:21); sanctification, in the city being holy (v. 2); renewing, in the city being new—*New Jerusalem* (vv. 1-2); transformation, in the wall and its foundations being built of precious stones (vv. 18-20); conformation, in the wall being of jasper to bear the appearance, the image, of God (v. 18; cf. 4:3); and glorification, in the city's expressing the glory of God (21:11).

The Triune God becomes the New Jerusalem by incorporating Himself with His chosen people (John 14:20; 17:21, 23), and His chosen people become the New Jerusalem through the process of God's organic salvation, the salvation in Christ's life. As revealed in the New Testament, God's salvation in its organic aspect includes regeneration, that we may have God's divine eternal life (3:6; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23; 1 John 5:11-12); sanctification, that we may have

God's divine, holy nature (Rom. 6:19, 22; 1 Thes. 5:23; 2 Pet. 1:4); renewing, that we may become God's divine new creation (2 Cor. 4:16; Titus 3:5; Eph. 4:22-24; 2 Cor. 5:17); transformation, that we may have God's divine image (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18); conformation, that we may have God's divine element (Rom. 8:29); and glorification, that we may have God's divine image in full (vv. 17, 30; Heb. 2:10; Col. 3:4; 1 John 3:2). Through such a salvation the chosen believers of all the ages are organically constituted with the Triune God, with the result that they are deified, i.e., they become the same as God in life, nature, and expression but not in the Godhead. The consummation of the believers' experience of such a salvation is the New Jerusalem, God's enlargement and expansion in humanity to be God's corporate expression in eternity.

No believer in Christ can be a part of the New Jerusalem without experiencing God's organic salvation in full. Regeneration, which functions as the entrance into the holy city (see "Regeneration and the New Jerusalem," *Affirmation & Critique* VI.1 (April 2001): 69-72), is the initial stage, the commencement, of God's organic salvation. To participate in the New Jerusalem, regeneration is an absolute necessity; however, it is not sufficient merely to be regenerated. After being regenerated, we must progress in our experience through the remaining stages of God's organic salvation.

The Wall and the Foundations of the New Jerusalem

Transformation is a crucial section of God's organic salvation, and transformation is portrayed most vividly in the wall of the holy city and its foundations.

Built of Precious Stones

The wall and its foundations are built of twelve kinds of precious stones (Rev. 21:18-20). In the Bible precious stones signify the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in the believers of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). There is a basic difference between precious stones and gold, the material used in the construction of the city proper and the street (Rev. 21:18, 21). Gold is a substance created by God. A precious stone, however, is composed of created elements that have been transformed through chemical processes involving countless years of heat and pressure in the earth. As such, precious stones do not signify something that can be given to us directly as a gift by God, such as the divine life and the divine nature, signified by gold, given to us by God the Father at the time of our regeneration (1 John 5:11-12; 2 Pet. 1:3-4). Rather, they signify something produced in us by the Holy Spirit over a long period of time through the Spirit's inward work of constituting (2 Cor. 3:3) in concert with the pressure and discipline engendered in the Spirit's divine arrangement of our outward circumstances (Rom. 8:28-29; 2 Cor. 4:10-16).

Whereas many believers in Christ realize the importance of regeneration, nearly all neglect the matter of transformation. Regeneration is the imparting of the divine life into our spirit to make us children of God (John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:16); transformation is the constituting of the divine life into our entire being, especially into our soul—our mind, emotion, and will—to make us mature sons of God so that we may express God in His divine image. The former is for the entrance into the holy city, and the latter, for the building up and consummating of the city. After entering into the New Jerusalem through regeneration, every believer must go on to experience transformation so that he may become precious material for the building of the New Jerusalem, thereby becoming, constitutionally, a part of the holy city.

The New Jerusalem, as the consummation of the church, is not built with wood, grass, or stubble, signifying the produce of the believers' natural life, which was created by God and became fallen in sin (1 Cor. 3:12). All the materials in the New Jerusalem are precious materials—gold, pearls, and precious stones—that are produced when the Triune God as the element of the divine life is constituted into the entire being of the believers by the operation of the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, who indwells them (Rom. 8:6, 9-11).

The Function of the Life of God

Transformation is not an outward change or correction but the function of the life of God in the believers. On the one hand, this adds the element of the divine life of Christ into our entire being and, on the other hand, discharges the old and negative things from within us. Consequently, we have a change not only in our inward nature but also in our outward image so that we manifest the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18) with all the divine attributes expressed in our transformed human virtues (cf. Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 4:2). This can be illustrated by the change in a person's complexion after he eats some nourishing food. Before eating, a person may have a sickly appearance with a pale complexion. After he receives nourishing food into his body, a metabolic process takes place within him in which the food is digested and assimilated to become his organic constituent. This inward, metabolic constituting with the element of the food spontaneously causes a change in his outward appearance.

Through regeneration the life of God enters into us to be a new element in our being. This life is actually the life-giving Spirit, whom Christ became through His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:45). In Romans 8:2 this Spirit is called "the Spirit of life," indicating that this Spirit Himself, the pneumatic Christ in resurrection, is life (cf. John 11:25). Through our regeneration this Spirit is mingled with our human spirit, making the two spirits one mingled spirit (Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 6:17). When we exercise our spirit in prayer and in reading the Word to contact Christ as the

Spirit within us (2 Cor. 3:17; 2 Tim. 4:22), the indwelling Spirit infuses the element of the divine life into us, issuing in a metabolic function in which the divine life is constituted into our being and the element of our natural life is discharged. The result is a transformation in our inward nature accompanied by a change in our outward image, our outward expression. According to 2 Corinthians 3:18, by beholding and reflecting the glory of the Lord with an unveiled face, we are being transformed (a process indicated by the word *being*) into the same image, the image of the glorified Christ in resurrection, from one degree of glory to another degree of glory. This transformation is from the Lord Spirit, the pneumatic Christ as the transforming Spirit. It is not any kind of self-improvement or cultivation, but it is the Lord Spirit, the life-giving Spirit, who moves within us to bring forth a metabolic change through the increase of the element of the divine life, the glorious element of the resurrected Christ, in our entire being. This change is not wrought all at once but is a gradual process throughout our Christian life.

Just as the growth of a child causes a gradual change in his outward form through the shaping function of his human life, the growth of the divine life in us shapes us in the divine image so that eventually we are conformed to the image of Christ, the firstborn Son of God (Rom. 8:29). This is for the mass reproduction of the firstborn Son of God as the prototype of a God-man, that we may be shaped in the divine image to be just like the firstborn Son of God, Christ as the God-man (1 John 3:2). By such a shaping in the divine image, we become the New Jerusalem. Hence, the New Jerusalem is the mass reproduction of the firstborn Son of God, carried out in us by the Lord Spirit through the metabolic process of transformation. This is the highest purpose of God in His economy.

Jasper—the Appearance of God

The entire wall and the first layer of the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem are built with jasper (Rev. 21:18-19). Furthermore, in Revelation 21:11 we are told that the holy city has the glory of God, which is God expressed, and that its light is “like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, as clear as crystal.” According to 21:23 the glory of God illumines the entire city of New Jerusalem. This glory is God Himself shining as the divine light of life (22:5) in Christ, the Lamb, as the lamp. The nations walk by the light of the New Jerusalem (21:24), indicating that the glory of God shines through the New Jerusalem as the diffuser to illuminate the nations, who live outside and thus are not part of the holy city.

The wall is the main part of the structure of the New Jerusalem. When the city is seen, the wall is visible first. Thus, the wall is the appearance of the New Jerusalem, and this appearance is jasper. According to Revelation 4:3, the ap-

pearance of God on the throne also is jasper. Thus, the New Jerusalem bears the appearance of God and expresses the glory of God by her shining. The color of jasper is dark green, which signifies life in its richness. Hence, jasper signifies God’s communicable glory in His rich life (John 17:22, 2). The appearance of the wall being jasper indicates that the primary function of the wall of the holy city is to express God in bearing His glory. In the New Jerusalem divinity is expressed in humanity, and humanity is glorified in divinity, with the divine glory shining forth with great splendor radiantly in humanity (cf. Matt. 17:1-2).

Transformation affects in us a change in our inward constitution that causes us to express the image of the glory of Christ outwardly (2 Cor. 3:18), which image is signified by jasper, a precious stone produced by transformation. To express the image of Christ is to express the New Jerusalem, for, consummately, the image of Christ, who is the image of God (4:4; Col. 1:15), is the New Jerusalem.

Eventually, in the New Jerusalem God and man both have the appearance of jasper. Through transformation all of God’s chosen people will be exactly the same as God, who sits on the throne in the divine glory in eternity—both He and they will be like jasper. This is the conclusion of the Bible. What the Bible presents at its conclusion is jasper. This jasper is the issue of the union and mingling of the processed Triune God and the transformed believers through the transforming Spirit. God’s purpose in creating the universe, including man, is to produce such jasper. This is the ultimate purpose of God’s complete salvation, i.e., to work on all those whom He chose in eternity to such an extent that they become wholly like Him in the divine glory to express the glorious image of God for His eternal enlargement and expression (John 17:22, 24; Col. 3:4).

The Twelve Apostles as Precious Stones

In the foundations of the New Jerusalem the twelve apostles of the Lamb are portrayed as twelve kinds of precious stones, the first and topmost layer of the foundations being jasper, the same material as the entire wall (Rev. 21:18-20). This indicates that the apostles themselves are transformed persons, and their ministry for God’s New Testament economy produces transformed persons as materials for the building of the New Jerusalem (1 Cor. 3:6-12). All the apostles were created of clay (cf. Gen. 2:7), but they were regenerated and transformed into precious stones for God’s eternal building. Simon was born the son of John, but when he came to Jesus, the Lord changed his name to Cephas, which means “a stone” (John 1:42). This was the Lord’s prophecy that Peter would become a precious stone for the building of the New Jerusalem. Later the Lord mentioned this again in Matthew 16 related to the building of the church (vv. 17-18), which will consummate in the New Jerusalem.

Before the Lord's death and resurrection, all the apostles, such as Peter, were not actually precious stones; they were still men of clay. However, they were regenerated through the Lord's resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3; John 20:22) and thereafter were gradually transformed by the Spirit to be precious stones for the building of God's eternal habitation.

In his Epistles the apostle Paul spoke of transformation in relation to the apostles and their ministry (2 Cor. 3:18), indicating that the apostles' ministry was constituted in them through their experience of transformation. Moreover, in his first Epistle the apostle Peter spoke of Christ and His believers as living and precious stones, produced by the growth of the divine life in them, for the building of God's spiritual house (2:2-5). Eventually, through the Spirit's transforming work, the twelve apostles, as representatives of all the New Testament believers, became the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem, the consummation of all God's building work throughout the Scriptures.

That the twelve foundations of the holy city are different stones of different colors indicates that the apostles had different ministries (cf. Acts 20:24; 21:19; Rom. 11:13; 2 Tim. 4:5; Col. 4:17). Peter's ministry was a "fishing" ministry, one which gathered both Jews and Gentiles into the realm of God's salvation through the gospel (Matt. 4:19; Acts 2:14-41); Paul's, a "building" ministry, one which built these gathered constituents into a dwelling place of God, the church (1 Cor. 3:9-12; Eph. 2:18-22); and John's, a "mending" ministry, one which mended the damage to God's building caused by the introduction of heretical teachings (Matt. 4:21; Rev. 2-3). The top layer of the foundations, the layer that meets the wall above, is jasper, the same color as the wall. This shows that all the work of the apostles issued in the same color, the same appearance—jasper, the glorious image of God in Christ as the unique expression of the holy city. All the apostles were transformed persons, having the same inner constitution wrought in them by the transforming Spirit, and their ministries issued forth from their transformed beings. Thus, all their different ministries were actually parts of the same common ministry, the unique ministry of the New Testament (Acts 1:17, 25; 2 Cor. 4:1; 6:3; Eph. 4:12) for the accomplishing of God's unique economy (1:10, 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:4). The unique ministry of all the apostles, carried out by their living and their work as transformed persons, is to dispense the unsearchable riches of Christ as the bountiful supply of the all-inclusive Spirit of Jesus Christ into the believers (Eph. 3:8; Phil. 1:19; 2 Cor. 3:3, 6) so that they may be transformed into the image of Christ and live Him for His expression (Phil. 1:20-21). This ministry issues in one expression—jasper. The sign of the New Jerusalem stands in sharp contrast to the many individualistic expressions that are being produced by different ministries of so-called Christian workers who have experienced little if any transformation of the Spirit.

The New Testament apostles, as transformed persons, are co-workers of God (1 Cor. 3:9), being one with God in their ministry (2 Cor. 5:20). They are overcomers who overcome everything that would distract them from taking the goal of God's eternal economy—the New Jerusalem—as the unique and ultimate goal of their living and their work. In their living they live out the reality of the New Jerusalem, and in their work among the believers they work out the reality of the holy city. They coordinate with the transforming Spirit by building the church as God's building with gold, silver, and precious stones, ministering the attributes of the Triune God—the Father with His divine life and nature, the Son with His redeeming and life-releasing death and His life-dispensing resurrection, and the Spirit with His transforming work—into the believers for their transformation. They do not do their own work but do the unique work of the New Jerusalem, the goal of which is to make every chosen one of God a person who is regenerated, sanctified, renewed, transformed, conformed to the image of Christ, and glorified by God (cf. Col. 1:28-29).

Conclusion

The New Jerusalem is built up as an organic constitution of God and man first by the Triune God's process in His incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, and then by the believers' experience of God's full salvation, particularly its organic aspect, through the divine dispensing of the processed and consummated Triune God as the all-inclusive Spirit into their entire being. The section of God's salvation that is most crucial to the building up of the holy city is transformation, which issues from sanctification and renewing (Rom. 6:19, 22; 12:2) and consummates in conformation to the image of the first-born Son of God (8:29) as a preparation for glorification at the Lord's coming (2 Thes. 1:10; Col. 3:4; Phil. 3:21). Millions of God's chosen people have been regenerated by the divine life to be children of God (John 1:12-13), but few are conscious of their need to be transformed after their regeneration. Hence, the Lord needs overcomers today, those who will open themselves to Him to be enlightened by Him, who will take His eternal goal as the goal of their life and work, and who will cooperate with Him by growing in the divine life through the increase of the Triune God's divine element within them (Col. 2:19), that they may be transformed into the glorious image of the Lord and be built up with all the believers in the Body of Christ to consummate in the New Jerusalem.

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Works Cited

Nee, Watchman. *The Glorious Church*. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1993.