

# “I SAW THE HOLY CITY, NEW JERUSALEM”— THE VISION OF THE NEW JERUSALEM AS A CORPORATE GOD-MAN

by Ron Kangas

It is an extremely serious matter for preachers, Bible teachers, and theologians to misrepresent God, to understand wrongly His eternal will, desire, and purpose, and to teach erroneously concerning the consummation of the divine revelation and the ultimate fulfillment of the divine economy—the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth. Nevertheless, absurd notions and bizarre concepts concerning the New Jerusalem are widely promulgated both in print and online, as teachers of the Scriptures present strange and often highly imaginative ideas of the holy city, the New Jerusalem. One writer has suggested that the city of God, the wife of the redeeming God, is a vast space city hurtling toward earth from its alleged origin in the third heaven. Another view, propounded by an erstwhile leading spokesman for dispensationalism, is that the New Jerusalem might be a satellite city suspended over the earth as the dwelling place of resurrected and raptured believers, who would have access to the earth, perhaps making day trips there for unspecified reasons. In *Eternal Perspectives: A Collection of Quotations on Heaven, the New Earth, and Life After Death* Randy Alcorn quotes the following from Steven J. Lawson’s *Heaven Help Us!*

Picture an area in the western United States between the Pacific Coast and the Mississippi River, roughly the distance from Los Angeles to Saint Louis. Or New York to Denver.

...God can never be accused of skimping or economizing...seven-million-foot height of the city....This statement by John—“according to human measurements”—means this description is to be taken quite literally.

That’s 2,250,000 square miles, on the ground. Then 1,500 miles up from there! Hang on! Are you ready for this? That’s 3,375,000,000 cubic miles, enough room to comfortably accommodate 100,000 billion people!

It has been estimated that approximately thirty billion people have lived in the long history of the world. Even if

everyone who ever lived was saved—which is not the case—that would still allow each person 200 square miles on the ground alone....There will be plenty of room for everyone who makes it to Heaven. (395)

It is amazing that such a view is actually presented as a serious possibility! Alcorn also quotes from one of his own books on heaven. Describing his understanding of daily life in the New Jerusalem, he asserts,

It’s likely that our tastes will differ enough that some of us will prefer to gather in the main streets and auditoriums for the great cultural events, while others will want to withdraw to feed ducks on a lake or to leave the city with their companions to pursue adventures in some undeveloped place. Wherever we go and whatever we do, we’ll never leave the presence of the King. For although he dwells especially in the New Jerusalem, he will yet be fully present in the far reaches of the New Universe. (406)

This may be Alcorn’s New Jerusalem, but it is not the New Jerusalem, the holy city, the city of God, unveiled in the book of Revelation. Human imagination or divine revelation—eventually the believers in Christ will need to choose what they will accept and live by.

## Not a Literal City but a Sign

If we would arrive at a proper understanding of the New Jerusalem, we first must realize that it is not a literal, material, physical city but a sign of a marvelous spiritual reality. Recall how Revelation opens: “The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him...and He made it known by signs” (1:1). The word *signs* is crucial and determinative.<sup>1</sup> As used by the apostle John, a sign is a symbol with a spiritual significance. In Revelation the seven golden lampstands and the seven stars are signs, signifying the local churches and the messengers of the churches (v. 20). “Even the New Jerusalem is a sign, signifying the ultimate consummation of God’s economy (chs. 21—22). This book, then, is a book of signs through

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which the revelation is made known to us” (Recovery Version, Rev. 1:1, note 2). Just as Christ the Redeemer is not literally a lamb with seven physical eyes (5:6), the New Jerusalem is not a literal city but a sign of the glorious fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose, according to the desire of His heart, to have a corporate expression of Himself in Christ as the firstborn Son and the believers in Christ as the many sons. Failure to understand this leads to the notion that the holy city is a place where some will listen to concerts and others will feed ducks.

### Not a Place but a Person

It is encouraging to note that at least some students of the Word have pointed out that the New Jerusalem is not literal but personal, that it is not a place but a person or a composition of persons. The claim that the New Jerusalem is personal in the same, or at least similar, way that the church is personal is the position of Robert H. Mounce in his commentary on Revelation:

Although a few writers take the New Jerusalem in John’s vision to be an actual city, it is far better to understand it as a symbol of the church in its perfected and eternal state. The point is that Jerusalem is the site of the temple, the place where the Presence dwells. In 1 Cor 3:16-17 the people of God form the temple where God dwells; here (in Revelation) they are the city. (382)

To be sure, the genuine church as the temple of God, the house of the living God, is not a physical entity but consists of believers in Christ, who have been born of God and who are indwelt by the Spirit of God. The people of God form this temple, and they ultimately form the New Jerusalem.

**A** stronger case for the New Jerusalem as personal is made by Robert H. Gundry in a chapter entitled “The New Jerusalem: People as Place, Not Place for People” in *The Old Is Better: New Testament Essays in Support of Traditional Interpretations*. He begins with the recognition that symbolic language fills the book of Revelation and therefore presumes that “the description of the new Jerusalem in Rev 21:1—22:5 deals in symbolism” (399). He goes on to say that this presumption is confirmed “when we read of the city’s coming down out of heaven, stretching out and up to unheard-of dimensions, having gates that each consist of a single pearl, being paved with gold that can be seen through, and so on” (399). From this he concludes that “such symbolic language invites symbolic interpretation, whatever the nature—whether concrete or abstract—of the reality so described” (399). Gundry proceeds to his thesis—“the new Jerusalem symbolizes the saints” (400)—and then declares that his intention is to apply this interpretation “thoroughly and consistently to the details of John’s

description of the new Jerusalem” (400). After a vigorous attempt to make such an application, Gundry asserts,

We may therefore conclude with fair assurance that John wanted his Christian audience...to see in the new Jerusalem not their future dwelling place but—what was even more heartening—their future selves and state. (408)

The New Testament itself provides sufficient evidence for us to be assured that the New Jerusalem is a person, even, as we will affirm, a corporate person. At this juncture, it may be adequate to cite two kinds of evidence. “The Jerusalem above...is our mother” (Gal. 4:26). This astounding statement, considered in its context, is worthy of careful consideration. Certainly there is not more than one “Jerusalem above,” one in Galatians and another in Revelation; rather, the Jerusalem in Galatians 4 must be the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21. “Jerusalem above,” the mother of the believers, is not a place or a physical city but a person. Since Jerusalem in Galatians 4 is a person and is the same Jerusalem as that in Revelation 21, the New Jerusalem in verses 2 and 9 through 11 must also be a person.

The Jerusalem above eventually will be the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth...She is the mother of the New Testament believers, who are...sons under grace. We, the New Testament believers, are all born of her from above and will all be in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth. (Recovery Version, Gal. 4:26, note 1)

**T**he apostle John testifies to his readers, “I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2). It cannot reasonably be denied that the bride here is the same as, or a full development of, the wife mentioned in 19:7-8: “Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean.” The wife here is the church, the bride of Christ, for whom the Lord Jesus gave Himself up on the cross and whom He has been cleansing and sanctifying (Eph. 5:25-26, 31-32). This wife, the bride of Christ, as revealed in John 3, is constituted of all those who have believed into the Son of God in order to have the life of God (eternal) and thus have been born of the Spirit in their spirit (vv. 3, 5-6, 15-16, 29). The bride in John 3, the church as the Lord’s counterpart in Ephesians 5, and the wife in Revelation 19 are the city-wife in Revelation 21. This understanding is enhanced by John’s testimony in Revelation 21:9-10:

One of the seven angels...spoke with me, saying, Come here; I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And

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he carried me away in spirit...and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down of out heaven from God.

It would be absurd to believe and erroneous to teach that the wife of the Lamb, our Redeemer, is a literal, material city. The claim that the Lord Jesus will take a physical city as His spouse is patently ridiculous. The holy city, the New Jerusalem, the Lamb's wife, is a person!

We will now proceed to advance the thesis that this person, the city of God, is a corporate person and that this corporate person is actually a corporate God-man. We admit that this is an astounding assertion, and we now present, as an initial sketch, the scriptural basis for this view of the city of God.

### **The God-man, the Many God-men, and the Corporate God-man**

In order to see how it is possible for the New Jerusalem to be a corporate God-man, we need to trace the divine thought in the Word regarding Christ as the unique God-man, the believers in Christ as the many God-men, and the church, the one new man, as the corporate God-man.

In Christ God and man, divinity and humanity, have become one entity—the God-man (Luke 1:35; John 1:14; Matt. 1:18, 21-23). Because the Lord Jesus was conceived of the divine essence and born of the human essence, He was born a God-man; hence, for His being as the God-man He has two essences, the divine essence and the human essence. Furthermore, the conception of the Holy Spirit in a human virgin constituted the mingling of the divine nature with the human nature, producing the God-man, the One who is both the complete God and a perfect man. As a perfect man and the complete God, this wonderful God-man has the human nature with its virtues to contain God and express Him with the divine attributes.

**C**hrist, the unique God-man, is both the infinite God and a finite man. For God to be infinite means that He is free from all limitations and that everything that belongs to His being is without measure or quantity. As the infinite God, Christ is self-existing and ever-existing—the great I Am (John 8:24, 28, 58; 18:6). As the infinite God, Christ is eternal and immortal, He is immutable, omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient, He is unlimited

in all His attributes, and He is the effulgence of God's glory. As a finite man, Christ in the flesh was limited in space and time (7:6), and He was neither omnipotent nor omnipresent. As a finite man, Christ was limited in knowledge (Matt. 24:36; Luke 2:40, 52), He had a natural, human life (John 10:11, 15, 17), He had a dependent existence (Matt. 14:19; John 6:57), and He could be put to death (1 Pet. 3:18). Although as the infinite God, Christ is the effulgence of God's glory, as a finite man, He did not manifest the glory of His divinity but concealed it within the shell of His humanity (John 12:23-24). Because Christ is both the infinite God and a finite man, He is truly the unique God-man.

**I**nitially, the New Testament speaks of the God-man, but eventually it reveals that, in Christ, the believers, the children of God (John 1:12-13), are the many God-men. In the divine economy the unique God-man has become the God-men—the sons of God and the brothers of Christ as many God-men (Heb. 2:10; Rom. 1:4; 8:29). The Lord Jesus, the first God-man, is the prototype for the producing of the many God-men, who are His reproduction (1 Pet. 2:21). In Christ God became man to have a mass reproduction of Himself and thereby to produce a

new kind of being—God-man kind, those who are both divine and human through regeneration, sanctification, and transformation. The first God-man (who possesses not only divinity but also deity) was a grain of wheat falling into the ground to produce many grains as His reproduction (John 12:24). The first grain—the first God-man—was the prototype, and the many grains—the many God-men—produced by this one grain through death and resurrection are the reproduction of the first God-man. If we see this in spirit and consider it with an open, renewed mind, we will realize that, as believers in Christ, we are God-men; we have been born of God, possess the life and nature of God (but not the Godhead), and belong to the species of God (1:12-13). As genuine children of God, we are God-men; we are the same in life and nature as the One of whom we are born (1 John 3:1; 5:1). Because we have been born of the divine life with the divine nature, we are divine persons, those who are the same as God in life and nature but not in the Godhead. Since we continue to be human, possessing the human nature, we may say that we are divine-human, or divinely human, beings, that is, God-men.

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The one new man—the church as the Body of Christ—created by Christ on the cross and brought forth in His life-imparting resurrection is the corporate God-man (Eph. 2:15; 4:24; Col. 3:10-11). The first God-man, the firstborn Son of God, is the Head of this corporate God-man, and the many God-men, the many sons of God, are the Body of this corporate God-man (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:18; 2:19).<sup>2</sup> This means that the God-men, as regenerated children of God, constitute the new man (Eph. 5:1; 4:24). The one new man is a corporate man, and this corporate new man is the aggregate of all the God-men (2:15). Through His death and resurrection, Christ produced many brothers (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:11), who, with Him, have become the universal new man; this is the corporate God-man, who is God yet man and man yet God.

**A**s the consummation of the new man as the corporate God-man, the New Jerusalem is the ultimate corporate God-man. As a divine-human corporate person, the New Jerusalem involves God becoming man and man becoming God in life and nature but not in the Godhead (Rev. 21:2; 3:12). In Christ God has become man to make man God in His life and in His nature so that the redeeming God and the redeemed man can be united, mingled, constituted, and incorporated together to become one entity, the consummated corporate God-man—the New Jerusalem. The city of God, the wife of the Lamb, is therefore a composition of divinity and humanity built up together as one corporate person. All the components of this holy city have the same life, nature, and constitution and thus are a corporate God-man. All those who are parts of this corporate God-man are God's children, God's species, forming the New Jerusalem as the corporate God-man.

Viewing this from a slightly different perspective, we may say that the New Jerusalem is a composition of God's chosen, redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, renewed, transformed, and glorified people who have been deified, that is, made the same as God in life and nature but not in the Godhead (John 3:6; Heb. 2:11; Rom. 12:2; 8:29-30). For the believers in Christ, the children of God, to be deified in this way is for them to be constituted with God in Christ as the life-giving Spirit (John 1:1, 14; Col. 2:9; 1 Cor. 15:45) so that, in Christ, they may be made God in life and in nature to be His corporate expression—the New Jerusalem—for eternity (Rev. 21:2, 9-11).

An outstanding feature of the New Jerusalem as the consummate corporate God-man is that it has the glory of God, His expression (vv. 11, 23). Glory is the expression of God, God expressed in splendor. The entire city of New Jerusalem bears the glory of God, which is God Himself shining out through the city. The glory of God is the content of the New Jerusalem, for the city is completely filled with this glory, indicating that as the corporate God-man,

the New Jerusalem contains God, is saturated with God, and expresses God. The glory of God is actually God Himself being manifested; thus, for the holy city to be full of God's glory means that God is manifested in this city. The New Jerusalem, the corporate God-man, as the corporate expression of God in eternity, bears the appearance of God, expressing God's image in His glory (vv. 10-11; 4:3).

### The Consummation of the Father's House

As a corporate person, the corporate God-man, the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 is the consummation of Jacob's dream in Genesis 28 and the Father's house in John 14. Jacob

dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it...And he was afraid and said, How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. (Gen. 28:12, 17)

Jacob's dream was a revelation of God's desire to have a house on earth that is a mutual dwelling place. God's eternal goal is the house of God, which is the church today and which will consummate in the New Jerusalem as the eternal dwelling place of God and His redeemed and regenerated elect. In His being the reality of the heavenly ladder (John 1:51), Christ reveals to us how God desires to have a house on earth constituted with redeemed and transformed people. The house of God, His building, is the mutual abode of God and man; God's home is man, and man's home is God (1 Cor. 3:16; Ps. 90:1; John 14:23).

What is unveiled in Genesis 28 is marvelously developed in John 14. The central thought in this chapter is that we must believe into God and thereby enter into God (v. 1). To believe in God is objective, but to believe into God is subjective; it is the subjective believing that brings us into God. It is by believing into the Lord that we enter into Him to be one with Him, to partake of Him, and to participate in all that He has accomplished for us. By believing into Christ, the Son of God, we are identified with Him in all that He is and in all that He has passed through, accomplished, attained, and obtained. In addition, to believe into Christ is to enter into an organic union with Christ (15:4-5) and to have our being merged into His so that we two may be one organically (Phil. 1:29; 1 Cor. 6:17).

**I**n John 14:1-6 we see Jesus going through death and Christ coming in resurrection to bring us, the believers, not into a place but into a person—the Father. Clearly, the Lord Jesus was going not to a place but to a person, the living Father Himself (vv. 12, 28). The Lord was going to the Father, and His intention was to bring His disciples into

the divine person of the Father, so that where He, the Son, is, the believers also may be (vv. 3, 5-6, 12, 20). The Lord had come from the Father by incarnation to bring God into man (1:14), and, according to John 14, He went to the Father in order to bring man into God (v. 20). The way of His going was by death and resurrection, and the purpose of His going was to bring man into the Father (v. 6). The words *I go* in verse 2 mean that the Lord Jesus was going through death and resurrection to bring man into God for the building up of God's dwelling place; this is the building of the church mentioned in Matthew 16:18.

"My Father's house" in John 14:2 is not heaven—it is the Body of Christ, the church as the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15). In John 2:16 *My Father's house* refers to the dwelling place of God on earth, the temple, and the temple is a type, or figure, of the body of Jesus, which in resurrection has been enlarged to be the mystical Body of Christ (vv. 19-22). Thus, *My Father's house* in 14:2 refers not to heaven but to God's dwelling place on earth—the church, the Body of Christ. In the Epistles the revelation that the church is the Body of Christ and the house of God is fully developed (1 Pet. 2:5; Eph. 2:21-22; 1 Tim. 3:15). The Father's house in the Gospel of John and in the whole New Testament is the Body of Christ, which is the church as the dwelling place of God on earth (Eph. 1:22-23; 2:21-22).

In the church as the Father's house are many abodes (John 14:2). These abodes are not glorious dwellings in heaven—they are the many members of the Body of Christ, which is God's temple (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:13, 27; 3:16-17). All the believers in Christ are the abodes in God's building, the Father's house; this building is the Body of Christ, and all the abodes are members of the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; 2:21-22; 5:30; 1 Cor. 12:27).

"I go to prepare a place for you" does not mean that the Lord intended to prepare a dwelling place for us in heaven; these words mean that the Lord would prepare a place, accomplish redemption, open up the way, and make a standing for us to enter into God (John 14:2-3, 6). In order for us to dwell in our prepared place in the Father's house, we must first have a place, a standing, in God the Father Himself. By death and resurrection the

Lord Jesus paved the way and prepared a place so that we might be brought into God (v. 20). By His death and resurrection He prepared a standing for us before God and in God; in this way He prepared a place for us in God (vv. 2-3, 6). Our standing in God, being enlarged, becomes our standing in the house of God, the Body of Christ. Anyone who does not have a standing, a place, in God does not have a place in the Body of Christ, which is the Father's house, the dwelling place of God. As believers in Christ, we all have a place in God, and now we should live in the place prepared for us through the death and resurrection of Christ. "In that day [the day of the Lord's resurrection] you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (v. 20). Christ the Son is in the Father, and we are in Christ the Son; therefore, we are in the Father by being in the Son (1 Cor. 1:30). By being in the Father in this way, we are simultaneously in the Father's house, which is not heaven nor a physical entity but the church as a person, even a corporate person—the corporate God-man with the Triune God in Christ united, mingled, and incorporated with the believers in Christ to be a universal man.

The church, which is the Father's house, is in God the Father (1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:1). For the church to be in

God the Father, God must become the Father to us, and we need to have a life relationship with Him (John 20:17). Because we have believed into Christ the Son of God, God is no longer merely our Creator; He is also our Father, our Begetter, for He has begotten us with His life (1:12-13). We call God our Father because we have been born of God, and now, as His children, we have a life relationship with Him (Rom. 8:15-16). Through His life-releasing death and lifeimparting resurrection, the Lord has made us, His believers, one with Him; thus, His Father is now our Father (John 20:17).

For the church, the house of God, to be in God the Father also means that the church is in the One who is the unique source, Originator, and Initiator (1 Cor. 8:6). This implies that the church is in God's purpose, plan, selection, and predestination (Eph. 1:5, 9, 11; 3:11). To know God the Father is to know that everything originates from Him and that everything proceeds from Him (Matt. 15:13; Rom. 11:36). In the church as the Father's house, the Father should be the unique source, and we all should be in His unique purpose and plan (2 Tim. 1:9; Rom. 8:28).

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The Father's house is a person, and we live in His house, the church, in a deeply personal way. In fact, here we learn to live a life of coinherence, a life of mutual indwelling. First, the Lord has prepared an abode for us in the Father and in His house, and then He, with the Father, makes an abode with us. This is a mutual abode—we dwell in the Triune God, and the Triune God dwells in us. This point is revealed in the word *abide* in John 15, where the Lord said, "Abide in Me and I in you" (v. 4). We need to experience and enjoy Christ as our abiding place (1 John 2:24). To abide in Christ is to dwell in Him, to remain in fellowship with Him, so that we may experience and enjoy His abiding in us. To abide in Christ is to live in the Divine Trinity, taking Christ as our dwelling place; to have Christ abiding in us is to have Christ as the Spirit of reality as the presence of the Triune God abiding in us (John 14:17). In Christ we have a dwelling place, an abode, which is an eternal person, and in this blessed abiding place we may enjoy eternal life in the Son (1 John 2:24-25, 27; 5:11-13, 20).

**W**e can abide in Christ, making Him our dwelling place, and He can abide in us, making us His abode. This mutual abiding is a matter of mingling. We are mingled with Christ because He is the Spirit and we have a spirit (2 Cor. 3:17; 1 Cor. 2:11). These two spirits have been blended together to become the mingled spirit (6:17). To abide in Christ, and thereby dwell in our prepared place, is to remain in the mingled spirit as our home. It is a marvelous fact that Christ and we both make our home in the same place, the mingled spirit; this mingled spirit is a mutual abode. When we are at home with Christ in the mingled spirit, we are in the place prepared for us in the Father's house. We abide, remain, in the Lord (who is in the Father), and He (in whom the Father is) abides in us. This is mutual indwelling, coinherence, the way we live in the place prepared for us in the Father's house. The Father's house, a corporate person, consummates in the New Jerusalem, the ultimate corporate person, the corporate God-man. This corporate God-man is a mutual dwelling place—a place (actually a person) where we dwell in God and God dwells in us for the eternal fulfillment and experience of John 15:4. We will dwell in the redeeming God as the temple, and the redeeming God will dwell in us as the tabernacle (Rev. 21:3, 22). The Triune God is our temple, and we are His tabernacle. He dwells in us, and we dwell in Him. This mutual indwelling of persons, this delightful relationship of eternal coinherence, is the New Jerusalem. To God the New Jerusalem is the tabernacle, and to us the New Jerusalem is the temple. Because God in His economy has become divinely human and we in God's salvation become humanly divine, we can live in Him, the God-man, and He can live in us, the God-men, and together we become a corporate God-man, a mutual abode, as the consummation of the Father's house in John 14.

## **The Consummation of the Corporate Christ, the Body of Christ**

The New Jerusalem, the corporate God-man, is the consummation of the church as the corporate Christ, the Body-Christ, the Body of Christ. The mystery revealed to the apostles in spirit involves the Jews and the Gentiles becoming one corporate person; this person is the corporate Christ, the church as the Body of Christ (Eph. 3:4-6). Because the church is a composition of all the believers with Christ, the church is the corporate Christ. The church comes fully out of Christ, is absolutely one with Christ, and is thoroughly constituted with Christ. Thus, the Body is Christ, and Christ is the Body—the corporate Christ.

We have a glimpse of this corporate Christ in Acts 9:4: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" This "Me" is the corporate Christ:

A corporate "Me," comprising Jesus the Lord and all His believers. Saul did not have this revelation. He thought that he was persecuting Stephen and other Jesus-followers...He did not know that when he persecuted these he persecuted Jesus, for they were one with Him by being united to Him through their faith in Him. He considered that he was persecuting people on earth, never thinking that he touched anyone in heaven. To his great surprise a voice from heaven told him that He was the One whom he was persecuting and that His name was Jesus. To him this was a unique revelation in the universe! By this he began to see that the Lord Jesus and His believers are one great person—the wonderful "Me." (Recovery Version, Acts 9:4, note 1)

**T**he "Me" is the corporate Christ, the Body-Christ, in 1 Corinthians 12:12: "For even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ." This reveals that Christ and the church are the corporate Christ, the Body-Christ. Christ in Himself is the Head, and Christ in all of us is the Body (Eph. 1:22-23). The Lord Jesus in Himself is the Head, but when He is constituted into us, becoming the life, fiber, and element of our tripartite being, He is the Body (Col. 1:18; 2:19; 3:4, 10-11, 15). The Head is individual, but the Body is corporate. Christ is both the Head and the Body, but we are the Body and cannot be the Head, because the Head is a matter related to the Godhead (2:9-10). All the believers in Christ are organically united with Him and constituted with His life and element and have thus become His Body, the corporate Christ, to express Him (1 Cor. 6:17; John 15:1, 4-5; Col. 3:4, 10-11, 15).

In reality and in experience, we become the corporate Christ by partaking of Him as bread. "Seeing that there is

one bread, we who are many are one Body; for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17). The one bread signifies the one Body of Christ; we are all one Body because we all partake of the one bread (5:7-8; 10:3; John 6:35, 51, 56-57). The Christ of whom we partake constitutes us His one Body. When we jointly partake (eat) of the bread, which symbolizes the individual body of Christ, it comes into us to make us one bread, which signifies the corporate Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12). To produce this corporate Body, Christ released the divine life through His death on the cross. As the one grain of wheat, the Lord Jesus fell into the ground and died and grew up in resurrection to bring forth many believers as the many grains, which are broken, ground, and blended to form one loaf, the Body of Christ (John 12:24). We partake of Christ as the element of the Body to become the Body, the corporate Christ.

**B**ecause the Christ who is the life of the Body is the Embodiment of the Triune God, the corporate Christ—the church as the Body of Christ—is four-in-one: the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the Body (Eph. 4:4-6). Ephesians 4:4-6 reveals four persons—one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one God and Father—mingled together as one entity to be the organic Body of Christ. With the Body of Christ, the Father is the origin, the Son is the element, and the Spirit is the essence; these three are mingled with the Body. The Father is embodied in the Son, the Son is realized as the Spirit, and they are all in us; therefore, we are a divine-human constitution, a corporate person united, mingled, and incorporated with the Triune God in the economy of God. Because the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all one with the Body of Christ, the Triune God and the Body are now four-in-one.<sup>3</sup> The consummation of this four-in-one corporate person is the New Jerusalem as the corporate God-man, who is constituted with the Triune God and who expresses the Triune God for eternity.

It would be profitable to look at the Body of Christ as this corporate person is revealed in Romans, an Epistle that discloses the precious truth that the perfect will of God is to obtain a Body for Christ to be His fullness, His expression (12:1-2, 4-5; Eph. 1:5, 9; Rev. 4:11). The deep thought in the book of Romans is that God became man so that, in God's complete salvation, sinners may be redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, renewed, transformed, conformed, and glorified to become the sons of

God, who are the same as God in life and nature, to be the members of the Body of Christ (8:3; 1:3-4; 3:24; 5:10; 8:14, 29-30; 12:2, 4-5). God sent His Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and condemned sin in the flesh so that sinners—serpentine beings, children of the devil—could be redeemed, reconciled to God, and justified by Him in order to receive eternal life and thus become children of God (8:3, 16). That God could send His Son indicates His existence in the Godhead as the only begotten Son (John 1:18; 3:16). Jesus Christ our Lord, who came out of the seed of David according to the flesh, was designated the Son of God in and with His humanity according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead (Rom. 1:3-4). Through this designation, He, the only begotten Son in the Godhead who had become the Son of man through incarnation, became the firstborn Son of God in God's economy, possessing both divinity and humanity. The firstborn Son of God, the first God-

man, is now the prototype for the production of the many God-men who, as members of the Body of Christ, are exactly the same as the firstborn Son (8:14, 29). This reproduction takes place through God's organic salvation (5:10) with regeneration, sanctification, renewing, transformation, and glorification. The purpose of God's salvation is to have Christ reproduced

in millions of believers so that, by becoming sons of God and brothers of Christ, they may become members of the Body of Christ (12:4-5). Through God's organic salvation carried out by the divine dispensing of the Triune God as life to the tripartite man, the children of God are growing in life to become sons of God led by the Spirit (5:10; 8:2, 6, 10-11, 14). The sons of God, the many brothers of Christ as the firstborn Son of God, are the members of the Body of Christ.

**N**ow we, the believers, are one Body in the organic union with Christ, a matter reminiscent of the organic union portrayed in John 15 with Christ as the vine and the children of God as the branches. We are one Body in Christ, having an organic union with Him; this union makes us one in life with Christ and with all the other members of His Body (Rom. 12:4-5). The Body is not an organization or a society but is altogether an organism produced by the union in life that we have with Christ. The Body is held together in the believers' organic union with Christ, and the actuality of the Body is the remaining in the organic union with Christ.

WITH THE BODY OF CHRIST, THE FATHER IS THE ORIGIN, THE SON IS THE ELEMENT, AND THE SPIRIT IS THE ESSENCE; THESE THREE ARE MINGLED WITH THE BODY. THE FATHER IS EMBODIED IN THE SON, THE SON IS REALIZED AS THE SPIRIT, AND THEY ARE ALL IN US.

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Both the Body of Christ in Romans and the New Jerusalem in Revelation are composed of sons of God. The sons in Romans 8 are the members of the Body in Romans 12. Without sons, there cannot be the Body, for the sons of God (not the children of God, to be exact) are the members of the Body. The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit regarding our life relationship with God the Father and to what we are through regeneration—children of God (8:16). Following their regeneration, the children of God need to grow and develop into sons of God. As the children of God experience God's organic salvation with sanctification, renewing, transformation, and conformation, they grow gradually into mature sons of God and may then, in reality, live and function as members of the Body. In order for Christ to have the Body (which consummates as the New Jerusalem), the children of God must grow in the divine life to become sons of God, members of the Body of Christ.

**W**hat is revealed in Romans regarding the Body of Christ composed of the sons of God is consummated in the New Jerusalem, which, as a corporate person, the corporate God-man, is the aggregate and totality of the divine sonship composed of glorified sons. In the context of a chapter that unveils the New Jerusalem in a detailed way, Revelation 21:7 says, "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he will be a son to Me." If we compare this with Galatians 4, we will see that the sons of God not only dwell in the New Jerusalem but are the components of the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is not something objective apart from us, the sons of God, that we enter; on the contrary, the New Jerusalem is something—a corporate person—that we are in the process of becoming. From Ephesians 1 we know that God, in eternity past, predestinated us unto sonship, and in Revelation 21 we see the fulfillment and consummation of God's predestination—the New Jerusalem as a living composition of the firstborn Son of God and the many sons of God. The sonship in Romans 8, along with that in Galatians 4, is for the New Jerusalem, the ultimate, consummate corporate God-man in God's economy.<sup>4</sup>

### The Counterpart of Christ

Perhaps the strongest indication that the New Jerusalem is a person and not a literal, physical city is found in Revelation 21:2: "I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." The holy city is prepared as a bride because she *is* a bride, the counterpart of the Lamb, the redeeming God, to fulfill the desire of His heart and to provide eternal satisfaction and rest in love. "The New Jerusalem is a bride, indicating that she is not a material city but a corporate person. To Christ she is a bride for His satisfaction" (Recovery Version, v. 2, note 3).

This understanding is supported by the word of an angel to John in verse 9: "Come here; I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." John goes on to testify that "he carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (v. 10). "I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb" plus "I saw the holy city, Jerusalem" demonstrate that the bride is the city, that the wife is Jerusalem. This is not mere comparison—this is identification. The bride, the wife, is the holy city, Jerusalem. The bride is a corporate person, and the New Jerusalem also is a corporate person, the consummation of God's goal, according to the desire of His heart, to produce an eternal counterpart for Christ the Bridegroom so that God and His redeemed people may enjoy a delightful married life forever.

**G**od's intention in His eternal economy is that He and His chosen people would be a universal couple (Hosea 1:2; 2:19-20; Jer. 2:2). The crucial emphasis of the revelation presented to us by all the prophets from Isaiah to Malachi is that God wants to have an organic union with His chosen people and thereby enjoy a blessed married life. In this union God is His people's life, and they are His expression (John 11:25; Rev. 21:9-11); in this way God and His chosen people eventually will become a universal couple (22:17). The prophets speak of God as the Husband and of His chosen people as the wife (Isa. 54:5; 62:5); this thought is fully developed in the New Testament (Matt. 9:15; John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 21:2, 9-10).

Because God's desire is to bring forth and be a part of this universal married couple, the entire Bible, as the revelation of God's heart, is a divine romance, showing that throughout the centuries God has had a romance with His people. The Bible is a record of how God in Christ courts His chosen people and eventually marries them (Gen. 2:21-24; S. S. 1:2-4; Jer. 2:2; 3:1, 14; 31:32; Ezek. 16:8; 23:5; Hosea 2:7, 19; Eph. 5:25-32; Rev. 19:7). The Bible shows us that when we as God's redeemed and regenerated people enter into a love relationship with God, we receive His life, just as Eve received the life of Adam (Gen. 2:21-22). It is this life that enables us to become one with God and makes Him one with us (John 3:3, 5-6, 15-16, 29-30). By loving the Lord as our Husband and thereby partaking of His life and nature, we become one with Him as His counterpart, enlargement, and expression (2 Cor. 11:2; 2 Pet. 1:4; John 3:15-16, 29-30).

The divine romance is portrayed in the Song of Songs (1:2-4). This book is a marvelous and vivid portrait, in poetic form, of the bridal love between Christ as the Bridegroom and His lovers as His bride in their mutual enjoyment in the mingling of His divine attributes with the human virtues of His lovers (vv. 15-16; 4:7, 10-15; 5:1-2; 6:4, 10). According to Song of Songs, our relationship

with the Lord should be very romantic; if there is no romance between us and the Lord Jesus, then we are religious Christians, not romantic Christians.

It is both enlightening and inspiring to see that both the old and new covenants are espousal covenants; the entire Old Testament and New Testament were written in this way (Jer. 2:2). The entire Bible is God's courting word; as a whole, the Bible is a word of such a divine courtship (2 Cor. 11:2). If we would keep God's courting word, we need a responsive, affectionate love for Him; this kind of responsive, affectionate love is depicted in Song of Songs, where we have a portrait of the love between the Beloved and His love (1:2-4; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; John 14:21, 23).

God created man with the purpose of having a counterpart (Gen. 1:26). God is a lover, and He created man in the image of Himself as a lover so that man would love Him (Mark 12:30; 1 Cor. 2:9). Therefore, God created man according to His own being (Gen. 5:1-2). God is loving, and He wants man to love Him (1 John 4:19). In this way there will be a mutual relationship of love between God and mankind, those created to be His counterpart (Rev. 22:17). In order to carry out His purpose in creating humankind in His image, God chose Israel to be His spouse (Hosea 2:19-20; Jer. 2:2; 31:3; Ezek. 16:8).

In typology certain women in the Old Testament reveal that the church is the counterpart of Christ. The church as the counterpart of Christ is typified by Eve as the counterpart of Adam; Eve's coming out of Adam typifies that the church comes out of Christ and has the life and nature of Christ (Gen. 2:21-24; Eph. 5:23-32). Rebekah typifies the church, as the counterpart of Christ, being chosen from the world (Gen. 24:67). Ruth typifies the church, as the counterpart of Christ, being redeemed (Ruth 4:13). Abigail typifies the church, as the counterpart of Christ, being the warring church in the midst of sufferings (1 Sam. 25:40-42). The Shulammitte typifies the church, as the reproduction and duplication of Christ, to match Him for their marriage (S. S. 6:13).

When the Lord Jesus came, He came as the Bridegroom for the bride (John 3:29; Matt. 9:15). The Lord Jesus regenerates the church so that the church may be His bride (John 3:3, 5-6, 29-30). The Lord is the Bridegroom

with the divine life and the divine nature; if we would become His bride, we must also have the divine life and the divine nature (Matt. 9:15; 1:18, 20, 23; John 3:15; 2 Pet. 1:4). Otherwise, the Lord would not have a counterpart; a marriage to someone who does not match Him would be strange, even bizarre. Actually, such a marriage is not possible. We, the future wife of the Bridegroom, must have His life, the divine life, the eternal, unchanging life of God. Through regeneration we receive this life; now in this life and by this life, we are qualified to become Christ's counterpart and to match Him (John 3:3, 5-6, 15, 29; Rev. 22:17).

At the end of this age, Christ will come to marry His redeemed and take her as His wife (19:7). The present age is an age of "dating," courtship, and engagement between God and His people (2 Cor. 11:2). At the end of this age, the present dispensation, there will be a glorious wedding day, at which time Christ will marry His redeemed ones (Rev. 19:7-9).

At the very end of the Bible we see that God will enjoy a married life with His people in eternity and for eternity (21:9). For eternity in the new heaven and new earth, the New Jerusalem will be the wife of the Lamb (v. 2; 22:17).

This is the fulfillment of the divine romance revealed in the Scriptures (Jer. 2:2; Hosea 2:19-20; Rev. 19:7; 22:17).

The wife of the Lamb, the New Jerusalem, is the real and consummate corporate Shulammitte, including all God's chosen, redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified people (S. S. 6:13; Rev. 21:2, 9-10; 22:17). The Shulammitte in Song of Songs, the duplication of Solomon, is the greatest and ultimate figure of the New Jerusalem. As Solomon's counterpart, the Shulammitte became the same as Solomon in life, nature, and image, as Eve to Adam (Gen. 2:20-23). This signifies that the lover of Christ becomes the same as He is in life, nature, and image to match Him for their marriage (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29; Rev. 19:7; 21:2). The many lovers of Christ eventually will become duplications of God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead, thereby becoming Christ's eternal counterpart; this is the fulfillment of the highest peak of the divine revelation—God becoming man so that man may become God in life, nature, and expression. The wife of Christ and Christ will be joined together to be the New Jerusalem, the corporate God-man, for God's

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expression; this is the consummated corporate Shulamite (22:17). With this the Bible ends, with a universal couple living an eternal married life—the New Jerusalem.

**A**s the consummation of the divine romance, the New Jerusalem will be this universal couple. The consummation of the processed and consummated Triune God and the consummation of God's redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified people will be a universal couple expressing the Triune God for eternity. The one who is man yet God is the wife, and the One who is God yet man is the Husband. According to its humanity, the New Jerusalem is the human wife with the divine life and nature, and according to its divinity, the New Jerusalem is the divine Husband, the redeeming God, with the human life and nature. Thus, the New Jerusalem is a corporate person—the corporate God-man, constituted with the processed and consummated Triune God with the redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified tripartite man (21:2, 10-11).

This is what the apostle John saw, and, in spirit (1:10; 4:2; 21:10), this is what we need to see today under the radiant shining into our hearts (2 Cor. 4:6) of the redeeming God, the Beloved, our dear Husband. May the veils that have covered God's people for centuries be lifted so that we may see what God wants, what is the desire of His heart—the New Jerusalem, the corporate God-man, to be His expression for eternity. Through God's mercy and super-abounding grace, may the day soon come when all the redeemed people will be able to declare, "I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem," and know that this city is a marvelous divine-human person—the corporate God-man. **AF**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>We must realize that the first verse of the book of Revelation tells us how this book was written: "The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him to show to His slaves the things that must swiftly take place; and He made it known by signs" (Rev. 1:1). This verse tells us that the Lord Jesus made this God-given revelation known to us by signs...The word *signs* is the key word to interpret the entire book of Revelation. Revelation is a book of signs. Every number in the book of Revelation is a sign...The lampstands (1:11-13, 20) are signs. The Lamb who was slain (5:6) is a sign. The lion (5:5) is a sign. The seven stars (1:16, 20) are signs. In 4:3 the One who was sitting on the throne looks like jasper. Jasper is also a sign. In Revelation 12:1 the universal woman crowned with twelve stars, clothed with the sun, and standing on the moon is a great sign...The last sign of this book, which is made known to us mainly by signs, is the New Jerusalem.

...If you say that the last sign, the New Jerusalem, is a physical, real city, then what about the lampstands as the first sign in this book? Are the seven stars in chapter one real stars? And what about the Lamb? Do you believe that Christ as the Lamb of God is an actual lamb with four legs and a little tail?...The New Jerusalem is called the wife of the Lamb. Since Revelation is a book written with signs, the New Jerusalem could not be an exception; it must be a sign. (Lee, *Elders' Training* 55-57)

<sup>2</sup>This corporate God-man is the "Me" in Acts 9:4-5. For Saul of Tarsus to persecute the believers was to persecute Jesus, because Jesus and the believers are one corporate person.

<sup>3</sup>I would emphasize the crucial point that this four-in-one organic entity exists only in the economy of God and not in the Godhead. Economically, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit form a four-in-one entity to be the Body of Christ. However, this absolutely does not mean that the church, the Body, joins the Godhead to partake of deity and become an object of worship. That would be grossly heretical. In the economy of the Triune God, the unique incommunicable Godhead remains immutable and inviolate. The Triune God is mingled with the church as the Body, but the Body does not become part of the Godhead.

<sup>4</sup>We may reasonably assert that the New Jerusalem is the fulfillment of Romans and that Romans, the highest point of which is the Body of Christ, consummates in the New Jerusalem. If we would have the proper understanding of the New Jerusalem as a corporate person, the corporate God-man, we need the revelation in Romans, and if we would have understanding of Romans as the gospel of God concerning His Son, we need to see the vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation. The New Jerusalem is the Body of Christ in its ultimate and eternal consummation. This is also the fulfillment of divine revelation concerning the divine economy: God's economy is that God became man so that man may become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead to produce the Body of Christ, the corporate Christ, the Body-Christ, which consummates as the New Jerusalem.

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