

What Is A Heavenly Country?

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WHEN men call themselves "strangers and pilgrims", they plainly indicate that they are seeking a country where they will be at home. This was the position of the forefathers of the Israelites, as shown by Heb. 11:13-16. What were they looking for? Was it the country by the Euphrates from which Abraham came? In that case they could have gone back. What they desired was "a better country, that is, a heavenly".

Their desire was based on the promise of God, who had called Abraham from Ur "to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance" (Heb. 11:8). When he reached Canaan, God said: "All the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 13:15). That promise was never fulfilled in the lifetime of Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob: yet all these men lived in the faith that God's promises could not fail: they "saw them afar off".

They had found the land, but not a home: it was not the place but the conditions which must change before it could be their country. They looked for a new order of things--"a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God". Such a city will not decay or be destroyed, as happens to men's cities: and the assurance is given that God in His purpose "has prepared for them a city". It will be "heavenly" not because it is in heaven, but because its origin is from Heaven, and not from man.

The new order in which that city will be founded is the Kingdom of God on earth, and some of the statements in Scripture about it are given below.

1. The Kingdom of God is to be set up in Palestine.

"THE KINGDOM shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem (Micah 4:8). "Saviours shall come up on Mount Zion . . and THE KINGDOM shall be the Lord's" (Obadiah 21).

"The Lord of hosts shall REIGN On Mount Zion . . . In this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things" (Isa. 24:23; 25:6).

2. When the Kingdom of God is so set up in Palestine, the country is to be made glorious.

"I will make the place of my feet glorious" (Isa. 60:13). "They shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations" (Isa. 61:4). "They shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the gayden of Eden" (Ezek. 36:35). "Her wilderness like Eden; her desert like the garden of the Lord" (Isa. 51:3).

3. When Palestine is thus restored to more than its ancient glory and prosperity, the glory of God will be manifested in it, and His law established in it as at a centre from which it will flow out to all the world.

"I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory" (Isa. 66:18). "I will set my glory among the nations" (Ezek. 39:21). "So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun" (Isa. 59:19). "The law shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Micah 4:2). "The isles shall wait for his law" (Isa. 42:4). "Neither shall the nations walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart" (Jer. 3:17).

4. The temple of God will be in it, re-built on a scale of grandeur that will be suitable for the worship of all nations.

"He (the man whose name is THE BRANCH) shall build the temple of the Lord" (Zech. 6:12). "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than that of the former" (Haggai 2:9). "Many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord" (Zech. 8:22). "All the nations ... shall even go up from year to year to worship" (Zech. 14:16). The temple shall be "as the frame of a city ... (having) a wall round about, 500 reeds (each way)" (Ezek. 40:2; 42:20).

5. The people in it will be all righteous; and the nations of the Gentiles who gather to it from year to year will also learn and perform the will of God, causing the earth to be filled with glory and joy.

"Thy people also shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever" (Isa. 60:21). "They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them" (Jer. 31:34). "Many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob: and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths" (Isa. 2:3). "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14).

6. It will be an age of light and peace and love; the rulers immortal; the subjects enlightened and obedient; evil restrained; death among men diminished; men everywhere blessed in Abraham and his seed.

"Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times" (Isa. 33:6). "He shall speak peace to the nations" (Zech. 9:10). Of "they that are accounted worthy to obtain that world" (or "age") it is said: "Neither can they die any more" (Luke 20:35-36). They shall have "power over the nations" (Rev. 2:26). "The Gentiles shall come from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Truly our fathers have inherited lies" (Jer.

16:19). "Many nations shall be joined unto the Lord in that day, and shall be his people" (Zech. 2:11). "Men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed" (Psa. 72:17). "In thee (Abraham) shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3; 22:18).

Jesus taught his disciples to pray: "Thy kingdom come: Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven". This prayer will be answered when the heavenly country desired by the fathers, promised to them in the days when they lived in it as strangers, will be manifested in the earth in the way and under the circumstances set forth in the foregoing testimonies of the Scriptures of truth.