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Messianic Perspectives®

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.

THE NEW JERUSALEM IN BIBLE PROPHECY

*An Interview with Janet Willis,
Author of What on Earth
Is Heaven Like?*

PART 2

BY DR. GARY HEDRICK



Dr. Gary Hedrick: Some people insist that there will be two Jerusalems during the Millennium. They say the New Jerusalem hovers over the earth and doesn't "come down" and settle in the Middle East until the end of the Millennium. What do you think about that idea?

Janet Willis: I don't think it's very likely. Ezekiel seems to emphasize that this City on the Land is God's dwelling place when he says "the name of the city from that day is 'The LORD is there.'"¹ Several other passages, particularly in Isaiah, also point to the City touching down on earth.² Also, John says a river flows from God's throne in the New Jerusalem.³ And Ezekiel tells us that water is flowing to the Temple from the south, where the City is.⁴ The water then diverts into the western and eastern seas [i.e., the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea].⁵ All of this strongly suggests that the New Jerusalem is positioned solidly on the very land of Israel.

Yes, good point. And what about Jeremiah 31, where the Prophet gives us those very specific geographic markers in the last part of that epic chapter? It sure sounds like a City sitting solidly on the earth.

Yes, of course, sitting right there on the new Temple Mount plateau in the Middle East.

So if you're right and the New Jerusalem will be here on earth, and it's where we will live during the Millennium, that raises several issues. Could we talk about a couple of those issues?

Of course.

Okay, one is the issue of death. There will be death in the Millennium, as we see in Isaiah 65:20.⁶

Yes, and there will be death in the Millennial Temple when animals are killed for the sacrifices.⁷ So there's definitely death on earth during that 1,000-year period. Like we mentioned earlier, there will be both mortals [i.e., people who will come to faith after the Rapture and will be granted entrance into the Kingdom in their mortal bodies] and immortals [those whose bodies will be raised in immortality—or "glorified"—at the time of the Rapture]⁸ on earth during the Millennium. The mortals will evidently have greatly extended lifespans, as appears to have been the case before the Flood.⁹

Right. But how can that be since in the last two chapters of Revelation, John says there is no more death and no more curse in Heaven?¹⁰

Good question! In this passage, the context shows us something very interesting.

What's that?

Well, just this: when John says there's no more death and no more curse, he's talking about conditions *in the New Jerusalem, inside the Holy City itself, but not necessarily on the*

rest of the millennial earth outside the City. Let's remember that the New Jerusalem is a very unique place. We've already seen that there's no Temple there, either.

That's right. You said earlier that the Temple will be located outside the New Jerusalem.

Yes.

So that probably answers the next question, too. John says there's "no night" in Heaven.¹¹ So he's talking there about inside the New Jerusalem, right?

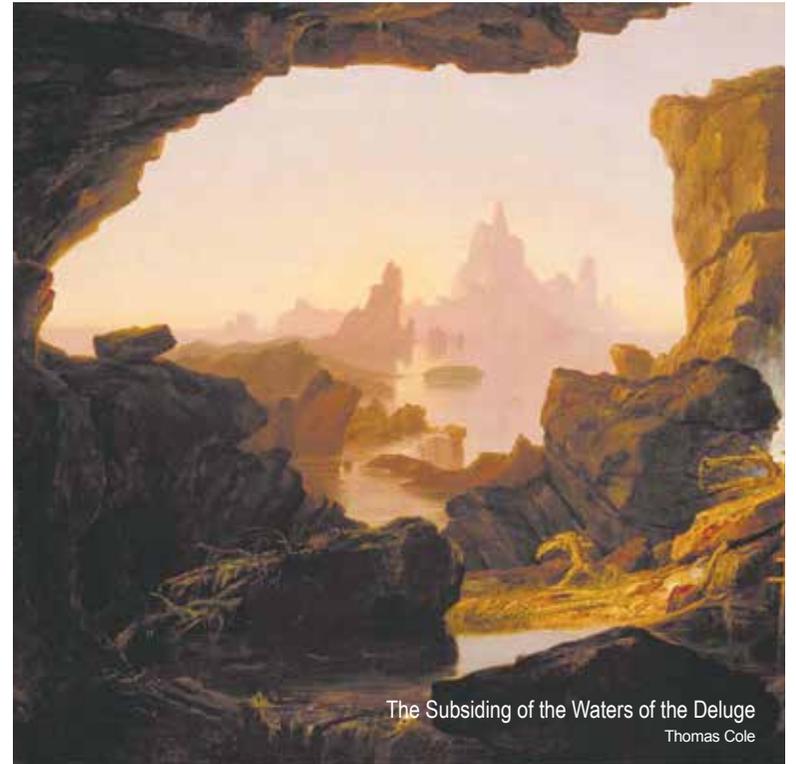
Exactly. The light for the City is provided by the Lord. We won't need lamps or sunlight.¹² The New Jerusalem will truly be a city that never sleeps!

Well, I'm looking forward to never receiving a light bill again!

Me too!

Some of our readers will find your interpretation of Revelation 20 and 21 interesting. Your view is that in Revelation 20, John gives an overview of the Millennium and then in the next chapter he backs up and gives more details about how the world will be restored after the horrific destruction of the Tribulation. How exactly does that work and how is it different from the traditional interpretation of these two chapters?

Well, many of us were taught that at the end of the Millennium, the planet is destroyed. Then a brand new planet is created. One of the proof-texts is 2 Peter 3:3-13, where it says "both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up."¹³ But the context of that section is the Day of the Lord comparing it with the Noahic flood.



The Subsiding of the Waters of the Deluge
Thomas Cole

Messianic Perspectives®

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I have taught that myself. But you're right—the context there is the Flood and the Flood destroyed things on the surface of the earth, but not the planet itself. So maybe this deserves further reflection.

I think it does. Other commentators say the new heaven and new earth refers to the earth's renovated surface and atmosphere after the Tribulation judgments of God's wrath. The words "new" and "passed away" are the same Greek words used when Paul says we are new creatures in Christ, old things are passed away. We are still the same person, just renovated. That makes more sense to me.

So it's sort of like what God did in the two creation accounts in Genesis. He gave an overview of the creative process in Chapter 1 and then backed up and focused on the creation of humankind in Chapter 2.

Yes, that's another good analogy. We have to be careful how we define the new heaven and the new earth. Often verses are used to describe the new earth and are assumed to be worldwide, but they actually specify place names in and around Israel. I'm not sure whether the renovation will be sudden or gradual, but placing the new earth and the New Jerusalem at the beginning of the Millennium harmonizes with many other passages throughout the Bible, such as Isaiah 65 and 66.

So you believe the planet will not be destroyed but will be permanent?

I do. I believe God has promised Israel a land-based kingdom that will last forever—and in the absence of any evidence indicating otherwise, I'm inclined to take those promises literally.¹⁴ With this timing, I found that countless puzzle pieces fell in place from both the Old and New Testaments without needing to be forced. And this harmony seems to reinforce that this is the path of truth when it comes to the size issue.

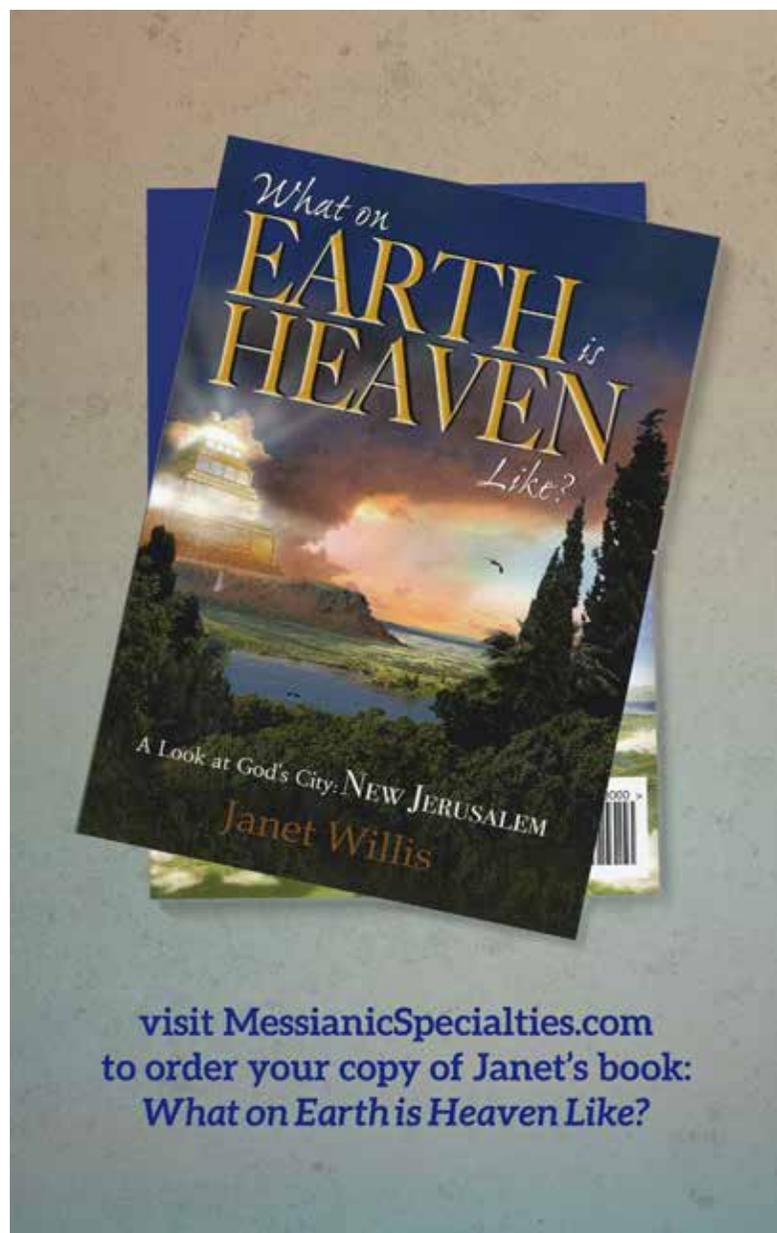
So, then, Ezekiel and John both provide us with measurements showing four sides, and a base with an area of roughly 121 square miles. But what is the actual shape of the New Jerusalem?

Because John says the length, width and height are equal, most premillennialists have assumed the City is shaped like a cube—like we said earlier.

J. Vernon McGee, as I recall, speculated that the measurements in Revelation are the inside dimensions of a sphere—and the sphere will be in geosynchronous orbit over the Middle East.

Yes, like a second moon, except that it's always over Israel.

Exactly.



And there are numerous other theories, as well. However, throughout the Bible, we see God’s dwelling place referred to as a mountain or a hill that sits on the earth—like in Psalm 48¹⁵ and Psalm 2.¹⁶

Yes, we do. And a mountain, geographically, has a distinctive shape with a wide base that narrows upward to a summit at the top. Sort of like a pyramid.

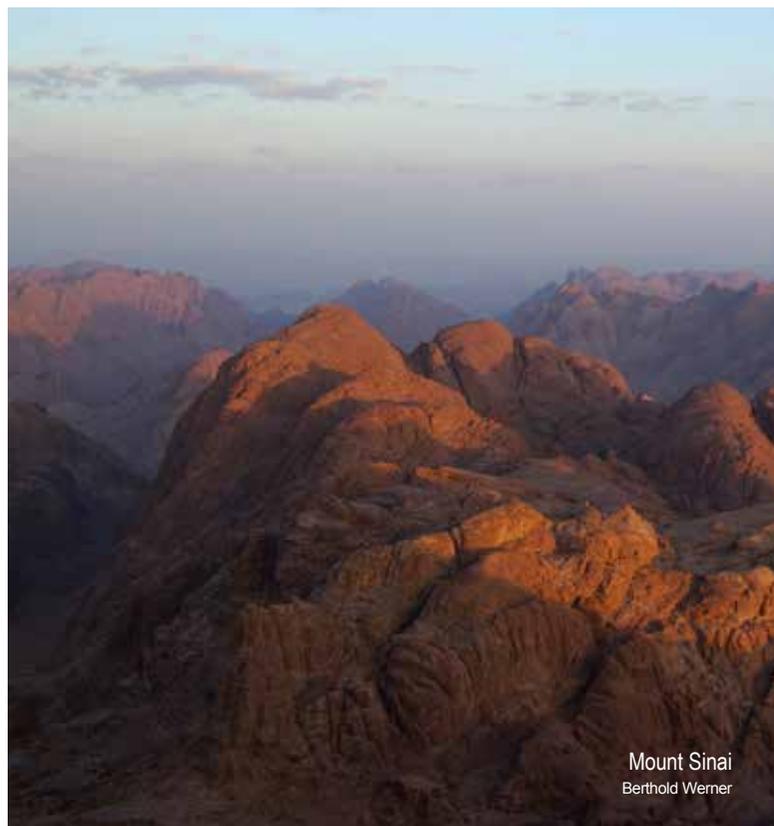
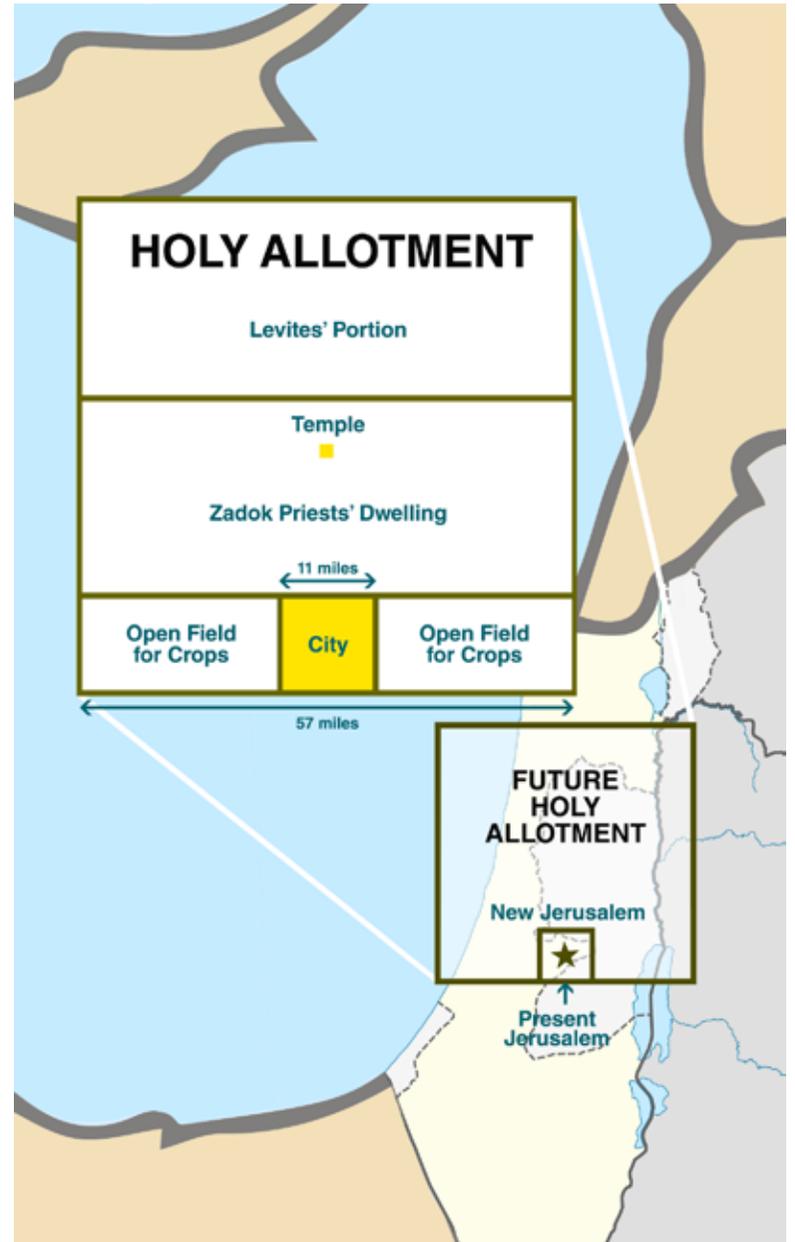
Yes, but that’s not all. Mount Sinai is directly compared to the New Jerusalem in Hebrews 12:18-29. The City layout Ezekiel describes is amazingly similar to Mount Sinai. The place of worship is separate from the mountain with dwelling places for the priests nearby. There is restricted access to the mountain where God’s presence is at the pinnacle (evidenced by the cloud and fire). This corresponds to the future protective canopy described in Isaiah 4.¹⁷

What’s your response when people remind you that Revelation 21:22 says there’s no Temple in the New Jerusalem?

My response is that they’re right—there’s no Temple in the Holy City. But everything still matches up perfectly. Just like the ancient Tabernacle was separate from Mount Sinai, so the Millennial Temple will be separate from the mountain-like structure, the New Jerusalem.¹⁸

And we know the topographical changes mentioned by Zechariah and others will make room for all of this new “urban development.”¹⁹

Right. The greater metropolitan area of Jerusalem will cover the new Temple Mount plateau that Zechariah describes, which is approximately 57 miles in length and width. I can picture the heavenly City, once it has landed on earth, and is standing on the south end of this great plateau—like a magnificent jewel in an exquisite setting. The millennial Temple in the center of the plateau is the smaller jewel, the complement, surrounded by tree-lined streets where the mortal descendants of Levi and Zadok live. And surrounding this plateau will be the rich and fertile land portions promised to each of the twelve tribes of Israel.



Remarkable. So God will fulfill literally every promise He made to Israel.

Yes, He will. And Gentile believers from every nation who have been resurrected, and also those multitudes who have come to faith in Yeshua during the Tribulation and managed to survive, will have a part in the Millennial Kingdom, as well. Immortal [i.e., translated] Jews and Gentiles won’t be limited to the New Jerusalem, but will have it as their home base.

When he was a little boy, our son asked me one day if Heaven was going to be like one, never-ending church service. He always got a little squirmy if the preacher (and sometimes that was me) got too long-winded, so he was relieved when I explained that when we get to Heaven, we’ll be engaged in many other activities besides singing and worshiping the Lord. Just think about what a family reunion will look like in Heaven, bringing together many generations! Or what about the opportunity to seek out biblical characters we have admired—like Moses, David, or King Solomon? It certainly won’t be boring!

Well, God seems to have created humans with an instinct for exploration—and there are countless galaxies to explore! But the New Jerusalem will always be “home.” The Jewish prophets, guided by the Spirit of God, have painted the perfect picture of the future City of Peace.



Can you imagine how those same prophets felt when they gazed on that City with their own eyes?

Hebrews 12:22-23 says that “the spirits of the righteous made perfect” are in the New Jerusalem now, so I believe when the prophets died they got to see it.

And Abraham “saw” that City with his spiritual eyes even before he saw it with his physical eyes.²⁰

Yes, he did. This reminds me of something Isaiah said when he described that day yet to come when Jewish mortals will see the New Jerusalem landed on earth: *Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices, they shout joyfully together; for they will see with their own eyes when the LORD restores Zion* (52:8). For centuries, Jewish families have finished their Passover feast saying, “Next year, in Jerusalem.” Someday there will be a generation of Jews who will finally get to see the prophecies about their beloved City fulfilled. Someday that hope will become reality.

So picturing the New Jerusalem as a mountain-like shape led you to other surprising conclusions.

Yes. Ezekiel 28:13-17 implies that the Garden of Eden was in “the holy mountain of God,” which could be a reference to the New Jerusalem.²¹ If it is, then the people who lived before the Flood might have known what the City looked like from a distance, even though they weren’t allowed to approach it.²² At some point between the Fall and the Flood, the City would then have been taken up from the Land.²³

I wonder why God didn’t just take up the City right after the Fall? Why wait until later?

Maybe the City was left there for a period of time as a reminder for Adam and Eve and their descendants about what they had forfeited in the Fall. God didn’t want them to forget what sin had cost them, or that He had promised to send a Redeemer to make everything right.²⁴

Good point!

It may not be just a coincidence that after the Flood, fallen mankind seems to have had a fixation, of sorts, on trying to build another “city” with the same general shape as the New Jerusalem—possibly a pyramid-like structure whose pinnacle reached upward into the heavens: *And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top [is] in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth”* (Gen. 11:4). There are thousands of these structures in various sizes all over the globe.

Well, it does make one wonder why all these ancient peoples, spread out all over the globe, shared this common idea about a mountain-shaped city whose pinnacle was in the heavens.

Yes, and some of the names they gave these structures tell us what they had in mind.

Really? What names?

The names some of those ancient civilizations gave the structures they built: like “temple of the foundation of heaven and earth” and “temple of the stairway to pure heaven,” for instance.²⁵

Well, you relate a lot of research about the shape of the City in Chapter Four of your book, “God’s Holy Mountain.” That’s where you point out that recent scholarship has redefined one of God’s Hebrew names, *El Shaddai*, as “God of the Mountain.”

And if this definition for *El Shaddai* is accurate, it’s a strong indication that the City is pyramidal in shape. Many believe the Book of Job is one of the oldest books in the Bible—certainly older than Genesis—and Job uses this name for God 31 times. God used this name to identify Himself not only to Job, but also to many of the patriarchs. Then when God commissioned Moses later at the burning bush, He pointed back to this earlier time saying, “I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty (*El Shaddai*)” (Exodus 6:3).

That’s fascinating!

THE MILLENNIAL “HOLY ALLOTMENT”: A NEW AND VASTLY EXPANDED TEMPLE MOUNT

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when the city will be rebuilt for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. The measuring line will go out farther straight ahead to the hill Gareb; then it will turn to Goah.”

—Jeremiah 31:38-39

The people who heard Jeremiah’s prophecy realized this enlargement of Jerusalem meant the topography of their land would be changed. The measuring line going straight out to a hill, implies that a valley will be filled in. To this date, even modern Jerusalem has not expanded to this extent. This expansion is referred to by another prophet. Zechariah gives a dramatic prophecy that describes massive changes that will occur in the future not only to Jerusalem, but to the entire area surrounding it.

All the land will be changed into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; but Jerusalem will rise and remain on its site from Benjamin’s Gate as far as the place of the First Gate to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king’s wine presses. People will live in it, and there will no longer be a curse, for Jerusalem will dwell in security (Zech. 14:10–11).

This large portion of land from Geba to Rimmon will be raised up most likely as a plateau, preparing a unique and exalted portion of land, a base for the new city of Jerusalem. Many more prophets talk about these topographical changes that will occur. Thus, we will find that Jeremiah’s and Zechariah’s predictions are just a few of many prophecies about the city of Jerusalem that have not yet been fulfilled.

—Janet Willis, *What on Earth is Heaven Like? A Look at God’s City: New Jerusalem* (Sebring, FL: Khesed Publications, 2015; Kindle Edition), 24-25.

The image shows a screenshot of the Amazon Smile website. On the left, a dark blue box contains the text: "smile.amazon.com" with a cursor icon, followed by "NOW YOU CAN SUPPORT CJFM ANY TIME YOU MAKE PURCHASES ON AMAZON.COM. SIMPLY TYPE SMILE.AMAZON.COM AND CHOOSE CJF MINISTRIES. A PERCENTAGE OF YOUR PURCHASE PRICE WILL AUTOMATICALLY GO TO HELPING US DO THE WORK YOU CARE ABOUT." Below this is a green notification bar: "✓ You have changed your charity to Cjf Ministries. Generate donations for your charity by placing orders here, at smile.amazon.com. Shop now". On the right, the Amazon Smile interface is visible, including the Amazon Smile logo, a search bar, and a dropdown menu showing "Supporting: Cjf Ministries". A pop-up window displays "Cjf Ministries" with the location "San Antonio, TX" and social media sharing options for Facebook and Twitter. At the bottom of the pop-up are links for "Your AmazonSmile impact" and "About AmazonSmile".

This might explain the passage we mentioned earlier, where it says Abraham “waited for the city . . . whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). In other words, he and the patriarchs had a special connection to the God of the Mountain—and the “mountain” is God’s Holy City! Maybe, just maybe, the patriarchs knew from some early oral tradition that Adam and Eve had seen that City. We can’t be positive about the connection between Eden and the New Jerusalem, or that ancient people knew about God’s City, so it’s speculative; but it is certainly worth a look.

I would say so! Now John tells us that the New Jerusalem someday will come “down out of heaven from God,” like a beautiful bride.²⁶ So that implies it’s above us, somewhere up there in the heavenlies, right now. I realize this is another area of speculation, but do you have any thoughts about where the New Jerusalem may be located now?

The Bible doesn’t tell us where it is right now—so like you said, anything we say about this is speculative. But maybe the New Jerusalem is in a different dimension, a parallel universe of some sort that we can’t enter (or even see) because of our space-time limitations. It might sound weird, but some Scriptures imply that the New Jerusalem might be situated somewhere above our atmosphere, right over Israel. And we can’t detect it there because it exists in a different reality from our own.

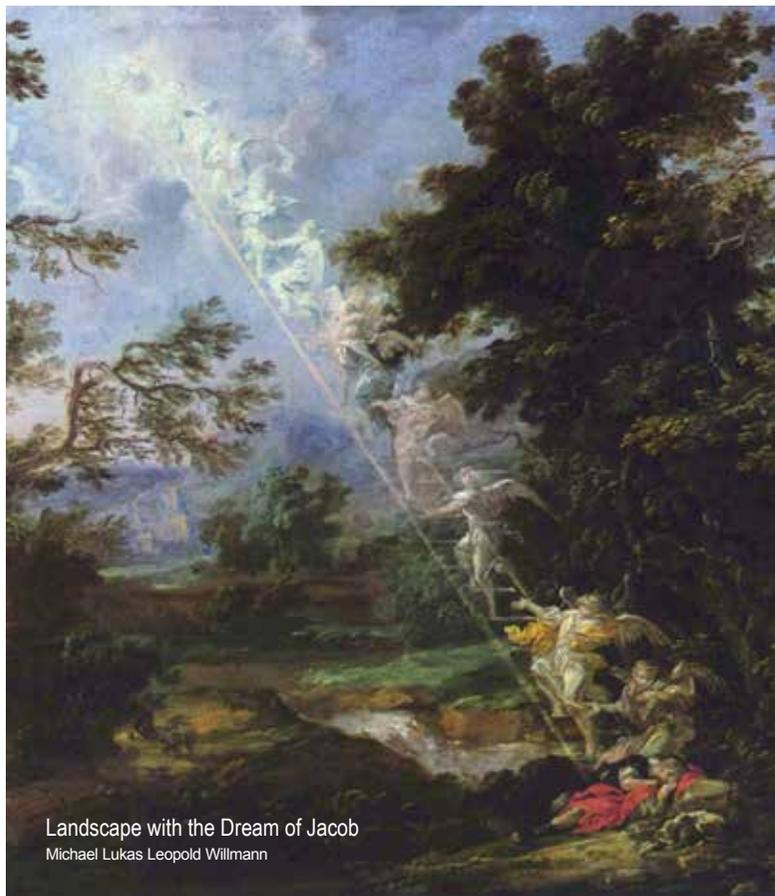
Really? What Scriptures?

Well, what about when Jacob had a dream of angels going up and down a ladder with the Lord at the top? Do you remember what he said?

What’s that?

Jacob said, “This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven.”²⁷

Wow.



Landscape with the Dream of Jacob
Michael Lukas Leopold Willmann

Other passages imply this as well—like Acts 7:55-56 and Psalm 68:33-35. Also, it’s interesting that Yeshua himself ascended upward from Jerusalem into the clouds and from there, presumably, onward and upward into that heavenly City.²⁸

And what about John’s mention of a “door” that allows passage between earth and Heaven? What’s that about? Maybe it’s a first-century way of describing an interdimensional portal of some sort.²⁹ If that’s the case, Heaven could be a lot closer than we think, maybe even closer than the moon, just outside our atmosphere, somewhere over Jerusalem.

We don’t know that for sure, but it’s a possibility!

If that’s the case, we can’t see it because it’s in another dimension outside our space-time universe. Someday the “door” will open one more time and the entire City will re-enter our realm and descend to earth.

Yes, maybe so. And it might become visible even before it descends. There’s a possibility that at the sixth seal in Revelation, when the sky rolls back as a scroll, the New Jerusalem becomes at least partly visible in the sky above.³⁰ Then after the last bowl judgment, with its topographical changes, the New Jerusalem touches down on earth.

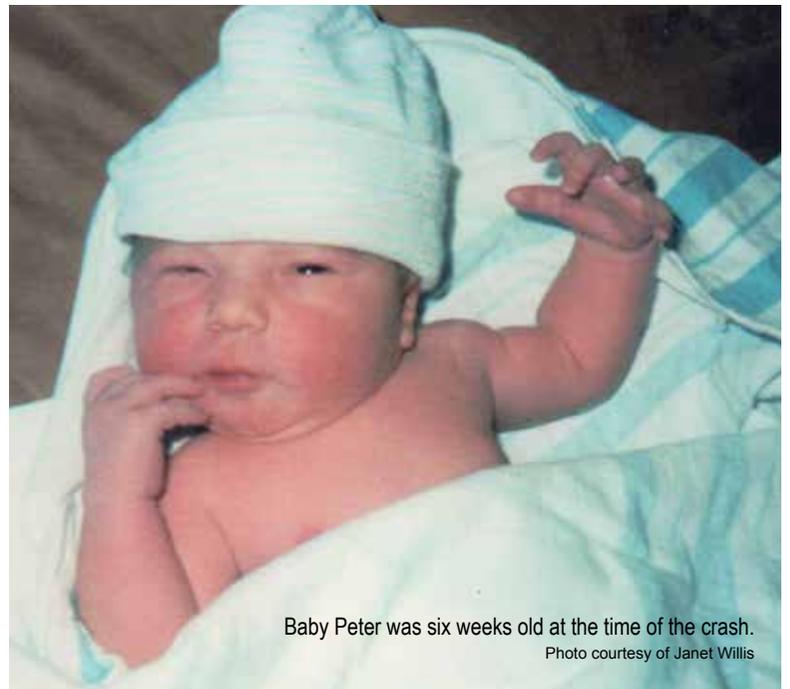
Janet, your youngest child was Peter, who was only six weeks old when he died in that crash. That was on November 8, 1994, almost 22 years ago. Do you think he has grown up in the New Jerusalem? When you see him someday, do you think he will be an adult? I’m asking about this because it’s a question our readers ask a lot. Do people age in Heaven?

As far as I can tell, the Bible does not give us a clear answer to that question. But in the immediate aftermath of our accident, I wondered a lot about it. I thought maybe Zechariah 8:5 was saying that my children will still be children when I see them again. Now I believe that passage is referring to the mortal children of Levi and Zadok who live on the new Temple Mount plateau, near the New Jerusalem but not in it—in other words, the greater metropolitan area of Jerusalem.

If your children are grown, do you think you will recognize them?

Well, somehow Peter, James, and John recognized Moses and Elijah.

Yes, they did.



Baby Peter was six weeks old at the time of the crash.
Photo courtesy of Janet Willis

So that might be an example for us. And the saints who came out of their graves in Matthew 27 appeared to people in Jerusalem who evidently knew who they were.³¹ My gut feeling is that my children will still be young, but at this point I trust whatever the Lord has will be perfect.

Well, if the Holy City is currently in another dimension, maybe time doesn't pass there like it does here on earth. So you could be right. Maybe your children will still look young when you see them again.

Maybe so. I'm content to wait and find out when I see them.

So you began your study with a focus on what your children are experiencing in Heaven. But your research took some unexpected turns along the way. And the result has been a blessing to those of us who have benefitted from your research and your book.

Well, gently and wisely, God gradually changed my focus. As I learned more about what eternity is really going to be like, I gained a greater understanding of God's own goodness. I saw

how His unfailing love for Israel is a picture of His *khesed* love for each of us who have put our faith in His Messiah.³²

Are you familiar with Randy Alcorn's book on Heaven?

Yes, I read it several times. The first time was about ten years ago.

How do your views differ from his? Any major areas where the two of you differ?

I know and respect Randy, and I especially appreciate his hard work and research. Reading his book confirmed much of what I had been learning in my own personal Bible study, primarily that our eternity, eventually, will be here on the New Earth, with the Lord. I still had serious questions about the New Jerusalem, so I decided to focus on searching out answers to those questions, which is a slightly different perspective from Randy's. The major differences in my book concern the size, the shape, and the timing of when the New Jerusalem will land on earth.

HEAVEN AND THE NEW JERUSALEM: A GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Cherubim

Unique, created beings in Heaven that have "human form" (Ezek. 1:5), yet possess other features that are animal-like (Ezek. 1:6-10). In the Creation narrative, their assignment was to guard access to the Tree of Life (see below) after the Fall (Gen. 3:24).

City of God

A reference to Jerusalem/New Jerusalem (Psalm 46:4; 87:3).

Heaven

Strictly speaking, Heaven (capitalized because it's a specific place, even more real than places like Chicago or Los Angeles) is wherever God's throne is; and currently, it's in the New Jerusalem. The Lord's presence is the essence of Heaven (Isa. 66:1).

Holy Allotment

The elevated plateau in the future Middle East where Ezekiel says the New Jerusalem and the Millennial Temple will be situated (Isa. 2:2; Ezek. 20:40).

Holy City

A reference to Jerusalem (Isa. 48:2; 52:1; Dan. 9:24; Matt. 4:5; 27:53; Rev. 11:2; 21:2; 22:19).

Holy Mountain

A reference to Jerusalem (Psalm 2:6; 3:4; 15:1).

Jehovah Shammah

Another name for Jerusalem (lit., "The LORD is there"; Ezek. 48:35).

Jerusalem

The heavenly/earthly city where God has chosen to put His name (2 Chron. 6:6). See also "New Jerusalem".

Kingdom

Can refer either to God's general dominion over all Creation or, more specifically, to the Messiah's future reign over the nations (Psalm 103:19; Dan. 7:14, 18).

Millennium

Messiah's thousand-year reign following the future Tribulation Period (Rev. 20:6).

Mount Zion, Zion

Used symbolically as a reference to Jerusalem (Psalm 2:6).

Mountain of the LORD

Another name for Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; 30:29; Micah 4:2; Zech. 8:3).

New Heavens/New Earth

God's renovation of the devastated earth and its toxic atmosphere ("heavens") following the visitation of God's judgment on the world during the coming Tribulation (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13).

New Jerusalem

God's City that exists now in Heaven and will come down to earth, replacing the old Jerusalem during the coming Millennial Kingdom (see also Jerusalem above; Gal. 4:25-26; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 3:12; 21:2).

Paradise

An orchard or garden in the New Jerusalem where the Tree of Life is located (Rev. 2:7; 22:19). See "Tree of Life" below.

River of Life

A river springing from the throne of God in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1).

Temple

The holy sanctuary (*Beit HaMikdash*) where mortals will worship the LORD God of Israel during the future Millennium (Ezek. 40—48).

Throne (of God, of Messiah)

A throne in Scripture is a kingly seat of authority. Both God and His Messiah are said to be seated on a throne or thrones (1 Kings 22:19; Psalm 11:4; Isa. 9:7; Rev. 22:3).

Tree of Life

A tree whose fruit enables one to live forever; originally found in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:22) and now in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:19). See "Paradise" above.

Ziggurat

A pyramid-like tower with steps leading progressively upward toward the heavens (Gen. 11:4). Many similar pyramid-like structures have survived from ancient times and are found all over the world. If Janet's thesis is correct, these structures may reflect the general shape of the New Jerusalem based on glimpses of it in antiquity (i.e., the Garden of Eden).



Well, I'm sure Randy would agree with us that the most important question in life is: do we know without a doubt that we have our special dwelling reserved in the New Jerusalem?

I can't think of anything more important than that. Salvation is God's great gift to us! It's free to us because the Lord died to pay for it. All we can do is accept His free gift and receive Him by faith.³³

So that's how we secure our reservation for a place in the New Jerusalem.

Yes, it is. So simple!

Yeshua said, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."³⁴

Yes, and when He says He wants us to be "where [He is]," He's talking about the New Jerusalem. The Father's house, with its many "dwelling places," echoes the phrase Ezekiel used: "a structure like a city." It means it's a real place. It's where the Lord is. It's where the saints of all the ages are. It's where my children are. And it's where we will all be someday, if we've placed our faith and trust in Yeshua the Messiah.³⁵

Well, it's time to wrap this up. One final question. If some of our readers have other questions for you about Heaven and the New Jerusalem, would you be willing to answer them in a future issue of *Messianic Perspectives*?

Yes, of course, I'd be happy to do that.

Then we'll invite our readers to address those questions to garyh@cjfm.org and we'll talk to you again soon.

Sounds good!

Janet, thank you. It's been great and I'm looking forward to our next chat.

It has been my privilege. Thank you, Gary, for making this possible. And I thank the Lord for all that He has done in my life, for His grace, His mercy, and His perfect plan. 



Dr. Gary Hedrick
is president of
CJF Ministries.

¹Ezek. 48:35

²Isa. 60:1-4 and 52:1-2a

³Rev. 22:1

⁴Ezek. 47:1

⁵Zech. 14:8

⁶No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, Nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; For the child shall die one hundred years old, But the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed.

⁷Ezek. 44:1-46, 46:24; Zech. 14:16-18, 21

⁸This also applies to believers who will die during the persecutions and disturbances after the Rapture and will be resurrected at the beginning of the Millennium. They, too, will enter God's Kingdom.

⁹... For as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people... (Isaiah 65:22). Regarding longer lifespans in the antediluvian world, note that Adam lived 930 years and Methuselah, grandson of Jared, lived to the ripe old age of 969 years!

¹⁰Rev. 21:4 and 22:3, 5

¹¹Rev. 22:5

¹²Ibid.

¹³2 Peter 3:10

¹⁴Dan. 2:44; 7:14; Luke 1:31-33; Psalm 105:9-11; Joel 3:20; Ezek. 37:25; and Psalm 132:13-14.

¹⁵Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised In the city of our God, In His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, The joy of the whole earth, Is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, The city of the great King (vv. 1-2).

¹⁶"Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion" (v. 6).

¹⁷Then the LORD will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering. And there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain (vv. 5-6).

¹⁸Ezek. 37:26-28

¹⁹All the land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be raised up and inhabited in her place from Benjamin's Gate to the place of the First Gate and the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's winepresses. The people shall dwell in it; And no longer shall there be utter destruction, But Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited (Zech. 14:10-11, emphasis added).

²⁰Heb. 11:10, 13

²¹Some evangelical commentators claim that the third oracle in Ezekiel 28 refers only to the King of Tyre and nothing beyond that should be read into the passage. Others, however, see something more diabolical here. One commentary explains: "The final prophecy against Tyre was a 'lamentation' concerning the 'King of Tyre.' God rebuked the ruler for claiming to be a god though he was just a man (vv. 1-10). This 'lamentation' over the 'king of Tyre' shifts from addressing the actual king to describing the power behind his throne (vv. 11-19). This is evident in that Ezekiel's description uses terms that could not apply to the human ruler of Tyre or to any mortal man. For example, he is said to have 'the seal of perfection' (v. 12) and to have been 'in Eden' (v. 13). He is called 'the

anointed cherub,' an angelic being who was 'on the holy Mountain of God' and 'walked in the midst of the stones of fire' (v. 14). He is also said to have been directly 'created' by God (v. 15), and to have been 'blameless' until 'unrighteousness was found' in him... Therefore, in this section, the prophet was not speaking to the literal king of Tyre but to the supernatural being who empowered the literal king, namely Satan. This idea is supported by the book of Daniel, which also links angels and demons to the principalities they influence (Dan. 10:12-14)" (*The Moody Bible Commentary*, Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham, eds. [Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014], 1245). Note also that Satan is said to have had access to the throne room of God in Job 1:6-7, providing further evidence that he's "the anointed cherub" in view here.

²²So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). While there is no explicit mention of the Holy City here, an absence of evidence isn't necessarily evidence of absence. After all, cherubim in Scripture always appear to be tasked with guarding God's unique dwelling place (e.g., "O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth" [Isa. 37:16]).

²³The scholarly consensus these days is that the ancient Garden of Eden was situated somewhere in modern-day Iraq. However, some researchers have made a case for its having been in the vicinity of modern-day Jerusalem. See "Where on Earth Was the Garden of Eden?" by Pastor Jared Wellman (*Odessa American Online* for January 3, 2015, at oaoa.com).

²⁴The first promise of a coming Redeemer is found in Genesis 3:15: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

²⁵Walton, John H. *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2006), 121-124.

²⁶Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:2; cp. 3:12).

²⁷Gen. 28:17

²⁸Acts 1:9-10

²⁹Rev. 4:1

³⁰See Joel 2:30-32; 3:15-17. For more details, see Janet's book *What on Earth is Heaven Like?* (96-101).

³¹Matt. 27:51-53

³²Khesed (כֶּסֶד) is the Hebrew word for "lovingkindness." David, for example, says: Show Your marvelous lovingkindness [khesedeykha] by Your right hand, O You who save those who trust in You From those who rise up against them (Psalm 17:7). CJF Ministries offers a Messianic Gospel tract entitled "Lovingkindness: Better than Life!" Call us, email us, or go online to order copies.

³³But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name (John 1:12).

³⁴John 14:1-3

³⁵For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16-18).

Bible Questions AND Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

Have a Bible question?

Submit it to Dr. Hedrick at garyh@cjfm.org, or mail it to 611 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas 78215.

You may see your question addressed in a future issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

QUESTION: Some people say the “mark of the beast” in Revelation is 616 rather than 666. They say the number 666 in the text is due to a scribal error. Is that true?

ANSWER: No, it’s not true. Neither number (666 or 616) is the result of an “error.” They both mean essentially the same thing in Revelation 13:18.

First, it’s important to understand that the number of the Beast in Revelation was most likely based on the ancient practice of gematria. (For more information about this, see the September-October 2015 issue of *Messianic Perspectives* [pp. 11-12], available in our archives at cjfm.org/resources/messianic-perspectives-archive/sept-oct-2015/.)

Gematria was the ancient practice of assigning numeric values to letters in the Hebrew alphabet (e.g., aleph = 1, bet = 2, gimel = 3, etc.). They would add together the values of the letters in a word (or name) and the resulting sum was that word’s gematria. In Hebrew, for example, the gematria of my given name (Gary, or *gimel-resh-yod*) is 213 (3+200+10). So it’s very likely that John was saying in Revelation 13:16-18 that the gematria of the final Antichrist’s name, like Nero’s, would be 666.

The Emperor Nero, a relentless persecutor of the Christian faith, was widely seen as an antichrist—and his name (when transliterated from Greek into Hebrew) yields a gematria of 666. Even after the demented Nero committed suicide in AD 68, many people believed he would be resurrected someday to continue his bloody rampage against God’s people. Nero, then, became a symbol or precursor for the final, end-time Antichrist. And the name and/or title of that final Antichrist, when he ultimately makes his debut on the world stage (although he most certainly won’t be a resurrected Nero), may well have the same gematria as “Nero Caesar”—666.

It’s true that one of the oldest Greek texts (a fragment of Papyrus 115) has the number 616 rather than 666. Most likely, a copyist made the change to conform to the gematria of the Latin title “Nero Caesar” (the equivalent of $\aleph \nu \rho$ $\kappa \alpha \epsilon \varsigma \alpha \rho$ in Hebrew). The two numbers (616 and 666), then, simply represent slightly different spellings (“Neron” in the Greek per some archaeological finds from the period, vs. “Nero”). We believe the reading 666 is preferred over 616, even though both numbers can point to the Emperor Nero as a forerunner of the coming Antichrist—which is really the whole point anyway. Irenaeus (AD 130–202), an early Christian writer with a connection to the Apostle John (who wrote Revelation) via Polycarp, was aware of the 616 variant but affirmed the true number as 666 (*Against Heresies*, 5.30.1). But many combinations of names and titles could yield the sum 666, so Irenaeus warned his followers not to engage in pointless speculation about who the Antichrist might turn out to be.

By the way, Revelation isn’t the only place where we find gematria in the New Testament (New Covenant). Another well-attested example is the Messianic genealogy in the first chapter of Matthew, where Yeshua of Nazareth is presented as a royal descendant of King David of Israel (vv. 1-17). The genealogy is arranged into three groups of 14 generations each (deliberately not all-inclusive, by the way)—and 14 is the gematria of the name DAVID in Hebrew ($\delta \alpha \upsilon \iota \delta$, or *dalet-vav-dalet*—4 + 6 + 4 = 14). What an amazingly elegant way of pointing to Yeshua as the rightful Davidic King of Israel!

So in an ironic sort of way, the same numeric system is employed in Scripture to identify both the true Messiah (Yeshua) and the coming anti-Messiah (Antichrist).

Unfortunately, Jewish mysticism has taken gematria and numerology to ridiculous extremes. We always advise Messianic believers to exercise caution and discernment to avoid these sometimes hazardous excesses.

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Fruit from the Harvest

by Violette Berger



A Mother's Faith

Richard Hill, CJFM representative (Las Vegas) and pastor of Beth Yeshua Messianic Congregation writes with sadness about the sudden passing of his mother-in-law, Theresa, but he and his wife, Oanh, rejoice at the blessing of her funeral. Although most Vietnamese are Catholic, Theresa was a believer in Jesus. Oanh had verified her salvation many years ago. After two days of viewing and services, Oanh had the opportunity to share the Gospel with 50 Vietnamese family members at the gravesite service. She shared her mother's words of encouragement and affirmation of her belief in Jesus. Rich observed: "It was a tiring and emotional two days and everyone was spiritually ready to listen to the Good News. Oanh had everyone's full attention! We praise the Lord for working to bring it about, because she was almost not allowed to share at the gravesite. Please pray for the seeds of the Gospel to grow in the hearts of Oanh's family and friends."

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

Rich and a team of volunteers regularly organize evangelistic outreaches at the local malls, where many Israeli Jewish citizens set up kiosks to sell their products. Recently, Rich met "Yacov," whose first language is Hebrew. Rich shared the Gospel, a tract and gave him a Hebrew New Testament with the condition that Yacov wanted it and that he would read it sometime in the future. When the team returned to the mall two weeks later and met with Yacov again, he told them that he had read the Jewish tract, the entire Hebrew New Testament and prayed to receive Yeshua as his Savior. Rich states, "What a blessing! We were *in wonder* that he read the entire New Testament in two weeks!" However, Rich said he could relate, as he, likewise, fervently read the entire Old Testament before giving his life to Jesus. Rich asks, "Please pray for Yacov and his newfound walk with Yeshua. Also pray we will be able to connect with Yacov again, as he has moved on, which is not uncommon with Israeli Jewish citizens since they travel all over the world."

During their outreach recently on the campus of the University of Las Vegas (UNLV), Rich and his team of volunteers met Ted. He was curious about their "Jesus Loves You" Jewish star T-shirts and approached Rich and began asking questions about Jesus. Ted grew up Buddhist in

China but said that he never connected with the religion. He started listening to Christian radio, and Rich realized that the seeds were already planted. Rich explained the Gospel message and answered all of Ted's questions. He finally asked if Ted was ready to receive salvation and live for Jesus. Ted confirmed that he was ready and prayed with Rich to receive Jesus as his Lord and Savior. He now attends *Beth Yeshua* and continues to praise the Lord. Rich asks that we pray for Ted's new walk with Jesus and protection from our spiritual adversaries.

The Road to Fruition

From **Columbus, Ohio, Eric Chabot, CJFM representative** writes: "While doing outreach on the Ohio State University (OSU) campus one day, I shared the Gospel with "Julie," a student. I knew a seed had been planted. About a month later, I was doing some outreach on another part of campus and when I returned to our outreach table, I was blessed to see and hear that one of my outreach partners had spent an hour with Julie. My partner had explained the Gospel and Julie had prayed to receive Messiah into her life. It was a beautiful example of how God uses His people to plant, water and sow."

Eric also has an apologetics ministry on the OSU campus and recently hosted Dr. Frank Turek who spoke on the topic, "Stealing from God: Why Atheists Need to Make Their Case." They were pleased that more than 200 students attended this two-day apologetics event. One student exclaimed, "I have never heard anything like this in my life!"

Salvations

At a church meeting recently, **Michelle Beadle, CJFM Southeast representative (New Orleans)** shared Jesus as seen in the seventh and final feast, the Feast of Tabernacles. Michelle writes: "At the conclusion of the presentation, I asked the congregation to pray a sinner's prayer with me so that those who did not have a personal relationship with Jesus could invite Him into their heart. Four children and three adults prayed with me to receive Jesus. The pastor was very pleased. Five came up to the front, the two who did not were too shy. The pastor prayed at the altar with the five who came forward and following the meeting, spoke with the other two new believers who had raised their hands."

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Terror in Israel

From Karmiel, Israel, CJFM Pastor Yosef Ovadia of *Kehilat Haderech (The Way Congregation)* “A new evil form of terror has been striking Israel. Terrorists have been taking advantage of the very dry and strong eastern winds to set fires across the country—always adjacent to Jewish towns and villages. Around the area of Karmiel, at least three villages had to be evacuated, with many houses burnt. Haifa—the third largest city in Israel—had to evacuate 13 districts, more than 80,000 people. Many buildings were burnt and many villages around Jerusalem and other places around the country were affected as well, as fires raged out of control. Praise God, as of this writing, there have been no casualties. We thank God for keeping us safe and also thank Him for stirring the hearts of Arab brethren who extended their hands and hearts to us during this difficult time. We, therefore, urge you to intercede for Israel and pray for the safety of the people and for God to use such terrorist attacks to draw more people to Him.”

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you (Psalm 122:6). 🙏

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