

THE NEW JERUSALEM



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The New Jerusalem

Introduction

Revelation chapters 21 and 22 contain descriptions of God's Holy City, the New Jerusalem. This city is called "the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:9). When she appears, John hears a loud voice saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them" (Rev. 21:3). We also find the names of the 12 apostles written on the twelve foundations of the city, and the names of the tribes of Israel written on the city's 12 gates (Rev. 21:12-14). Rather than a literal place where Christians will spend the afterlife with God, the New Jerusalem seems to be people of all times and places, of both testaments, who have given themselves to the Lord in marriage.

Marriage has made us one flesh with Jesus (Eph. 5:31, 32). Because of this, it is even truer to say that the New Jerusalem is one Person, Christ. We are no longer called by our own names or known by our individual selves. We are called by the name of our Husband, we are known only by

Him. In His Son, God created one New Man, and that Man is Christ.

Israel was set apart by God to typify the New Man. We can see this intimated when God refers to the Israelites collectively as “my son,” and “anointed one,” (Ex. 4:22; Hosea 11:1; Psalm 28:8; Hab. 3:13). Similarly, the names of Jacob’s 12 sons do not only identify the tribes which God forged into the nation of Israel. They describe the Person whom Israel was called to prophetically represent. This is why the names of the tribes are inscribed on the pearl gates which adorn the walls of the New Jerusalem—John is having a vision of the New Man, the true Israel, in whom God forged everlasting peace and union with mankind.

The purpose of this booklet is to present Christ as He is revealed through the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. What is offered here just scratches the surface of the unsearchable riches in Christ (Eph. 3:8). But that is the greatness of the New Man. Any study of this Man, no matter how exhaustive, is necessarily limited when compared with His limitless glory. By grace, He has made us a city on a hill—those out of

**whom that glory will shine forever (Matt. 5:14;
Rev. 21:11).**

Reuben—“See, a Son.”

Of Jacob’s two wives, the scripture tells us that Leah was not loved. The name Reuben comes out of this—“She named him Reuben, for she said, ‘It is because the LORD has seen my misery’” (Gen. 29:32). Leah put her hope in this son saying, “Surely my husband will love me now” (Gen. 29:32). Despite the misery surrounding his birth, Jacob later said, “Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power” (Gen. 49:3). Together, these verses declare another Son, one described in Colossians chapter 1:15, 18: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation...he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.” Out of the misery of God’s rejection, and of death, Christ was raised, the firstborn from among the dead, excelling in honor and in power. Truly, He is the first sign of the Father’s “mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead” (Eph. 1:19, 20).

Simeon—“He hears/obeys.”

While Reuben was a sign to Leah that the LORD had seen her misery, Simeon’s birth is explained this way: “Because the LORD heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too” (Gen. 29:33). Simeon, then, is a sign that God hears. But the name also suggests something about the Son to whom it belongs, because Simeon can also mean, “He yields,” or “He obeys.” This Son is no “forgetful hearer,” but one who “became obedient to death—even death on a cross” (James 1:25; Phil. 2:8). Because of His submission, “God exalted him to the highest place” (Phil. 2:9, 10). The scripture also says, “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission” (Heb. 5:7). So it turns out, not surprisingly, that the submission of the Son is directly connected to God hearing.

Levi—“Joined to.”

The Brown, Driver, and Briggs lexicon of the Hebrew language says that Levi is “interpreted as *joined*, for example husband to wife;”¹ This indeed was Leah’s hope when she named Levi—“Now at last my husband will become joined to me, because I have borne him three sons” (Gen. 29:34). In the end, the joining spoken of was actually that of Levi and the LORD:

The LORD also said to Moses, “I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every first-born that opens the womb among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be mine, for all the first-born are mine; on the day that I slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the first-born in Israel, both of man and of beast; they shall be mine: I am the Lord” (Num. 3:11-13).

The Levites were given to the LORD, and to the ministry of the Tabernacle (Num. 1:47-50). In

¹ Brown, F., Driver, S., Briggs, C. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Mass: Hendrickson Pub. Inc., 1996: 532.

the true spirit of priesthood, they gave up their own lives for the sake of the Israelites. But because they lost their lives and did not seek to save them, they found their lives in God. In Joshua we read:

But to the tribe of Levi he gave no inheritance, since the offerings made by fire to the LORD, the God of Israel, are their inheritance, as he promised them (Josh. 13:14).

But to the tribe of Levi, Moses had given no inheritance; the LORD, the God of Israel, is their inheritance, as he promised them (Josh. 13:33).

In Levi we are given a picture of the Son, High Priest of the Living God, who prayed, “All I have is yours, and all you have is mine...Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one” (John 17:10, 11). This is the One whose name is “joined to.”

Judah—“Praise Yah.”

When Leah gave birth to her fourth son, she named him Judah saying, “This time, I will praise the LORD” (Gen. 29:35). With this birth, Leah says nothing about hoping to win Jacob’s love. Instead, she praises the LORD. Unloved, and every expectation yet unfulfilled, she seems to find fulfillment in God, and she praises Him simply for His own worth. There is in this an acceptance that can only be called subjection. What by far supercedes every circumstance, good or bad, is that there is a Master who is worthy. “For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, ‘What are you doing?’” (Eccl. 8:4).

The praise and subjection of the King also became Judah’s inheritance from the Lord. Jacob blessed him in the words, “Judah, your brothers will praise you...The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs, and the obedience of the nations is his” (Gen. 49:8, 10). Why, when Israel had many sons, was one lifted up to rule and to be praised

by the others? The One to whom the scepter belongs gave this explanation:

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:43-45).

Although many sons are brought to glory, one of their brothers has authored their salvation through suffering—“You are worthy...because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God” (Heb. 2:10; Rev. 5:9). “You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy” (Psalm 45:7). Because Christ became the least among men, God has made Him first in His kingdom. “The last will be first, and the first last” (Matt. 16:20).

This is seen in Judah. Once, the sons of Israel came to Egypt to beg for food because there was a famine. Unbeknownst to them, their brother Joseph had become Pharaoh’s right hand man,

and it was him they asked for food. However, they did not recognize him; he pretended to be harsh with them and accused them of being spies and of stealing from him. In order to prove their loyalty, he told them to bring their father Jacob to Egypt. They agreed, but Joseph acted like he didn't trust them. To ensure they brought Jacob, he demanded that Benjamin remain in his dungeon. To this, Judah replied, "Now then, please let [me] remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers" (Gen. 44:33).

Judah is the Son who was willing to descend into the dungeon of hell, and to be the slave of sin and death in our place. "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11).

Naphtali—“My Struggle.”

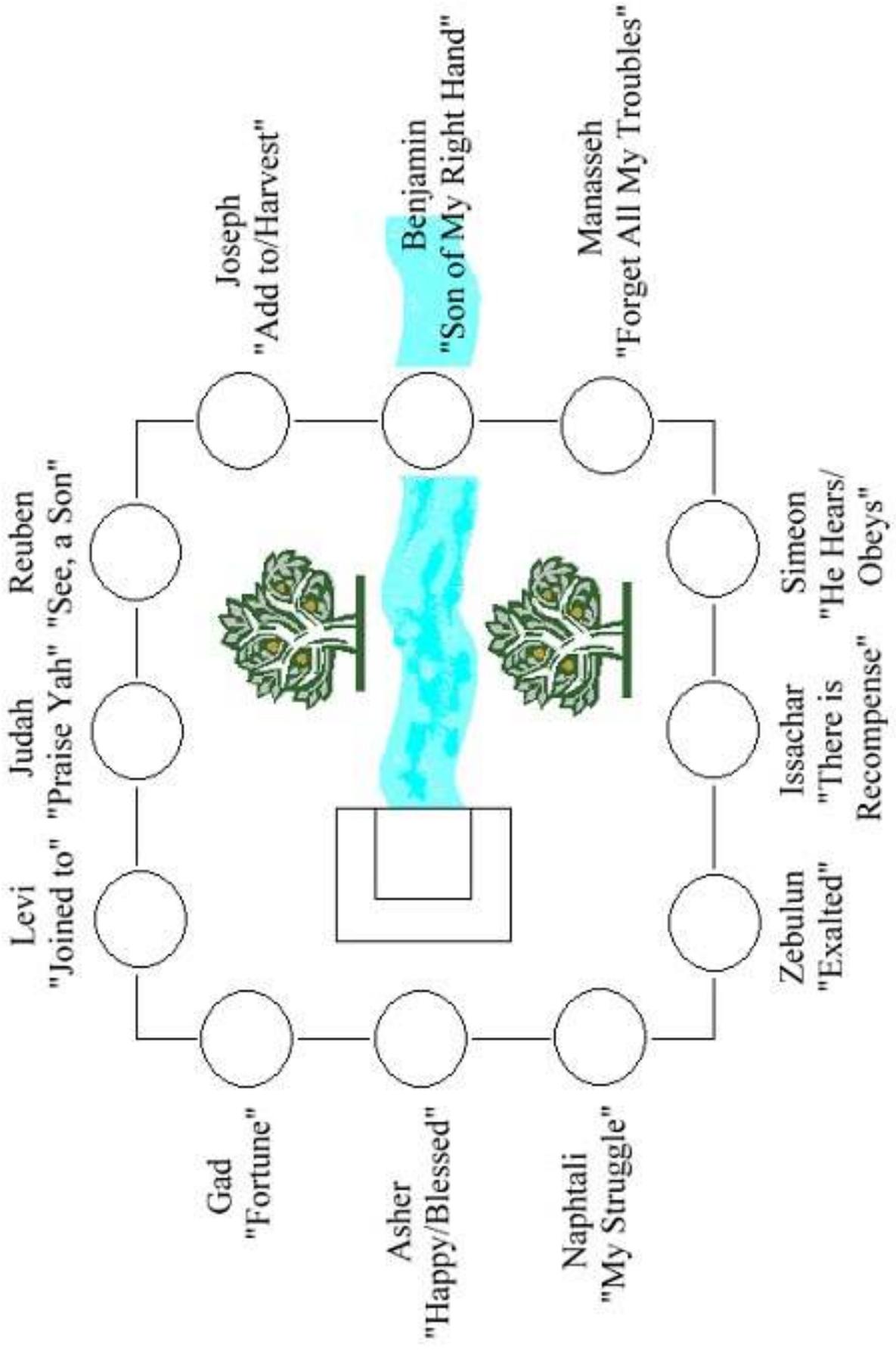
Naphtali is the second son born to Rachel through her maidservant Bilhah. Of Naphtali she says, “With wrestlings of God I have wrestled with my sister, and I have overcome” (Gen. 30:8). It is this Son that says to us, in John’s gospel, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Although the cords of death entangled Him, “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (Psalm 116:3; 1 Cor. 15:54). Although “our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens,” He struggled with sin to the point of shedding His own blood (Ezra 9:6; Heb. 12:4). Although the enemy rejoiced over Him, He made a public spectacle of him, triumphing over him “by the cross” (Micah 7:8; Col. 2:15). “Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ” (2 Cor. 2:14).

Gad—“Good Fortune.”

After having given birth to Jacob’s first 4 sons, Leah was unable to have children for a time. It was during this time Rachel had Dan and Naphtali by her maidservant. Not to be outdone, Leah gave her maidservant Zilpah to Jacob, and “Zilpah bore Jacob a son. Then Leah said, ‘What good fortune!’ So she named him Gad” (Gen. 30:10, 11). This Son is the restoration of life and fruitfulness, given to those who have suffered a time of death and barrenness. He is the one who says, “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!” (Rev. 1:17, 18). And to those like Peter who say, “We have left all we had to follow you!” He replies, “I tell you the truth, no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life” (Luke 18:28, 29).

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(Rev. 21:12,13; Ezek. 48:30-34)



Asher—“Happy,” or “Blessed.”

When Leah’s maidservant Zilpah gave birth to a second son, Leah said, “The women will call me happy.’ So she named him Asher” (Gen. 30:13). “Happy are the poor in spirit,” for “you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (Matt. 5:3; 2 Cor. 8:9). “Happy are those who mourn,” for “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away,” and He is “making everything new!” (Matt. 5:4; Rev. 21:4, 5). “Happy are the meek,” for he is “meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 5:5, 11:29). “Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,” for he is “the bread of life;” whoever comes to Him will never hunger, whoever believes in Him will never thirst (Matt. 5:6; John 6:35). “Happy are the pure in heart,” for “we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as

**Christ is pure” (Matt. 5:8; 1 John 3:2, 3).
“Happy are the peacemakers,” for “he himself is
our peace, who has made the two one and has
destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of
hostility” (Matt. 5:9; Eph. 2:14). “Happy are
those who are persecuted,” for “you participate
in the sufferings of Christ...If you are insulted
because of the name of Christ, you are blessed,
for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you”
(Matt. 5:10; 1 Peter 4:13, 14).**

Issachar—“There is Recompense.”

**When Leah herself became pregnant again,
she considered it a reward for what she had done,
saying, “God has rewarded me for giving my
maidservant to my husband” (Gen. 30:18). This
Son says to us, “Behold, I am coming soon! My
reward is with me, and I will give to everyone
according to what he has done” (Rev. 22:12). “To
those who by persistence in doing good seek
glory, honor, and immortality, he will give
eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking
and who reject the truth and follow evil, there
will be wrath and anger” (Rom. 2:7, 8).**

For some of us, reading these things might seem to conflict with verses such as 2 Timothy 1:9, “who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.” Notice that, according to this verse, we are saved by grace, and not at all by our own good deeds. Notice also, however, what we have been saved unto—a holy life. The Bible makes it clear that once we freely receive new life, it will manifest in our bodies. “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God” (1 John 3:9). The ability to do the good that is rewarded with eternal life, then, also comes from that life. “For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Phil. 2:13). The fact that “There is Recompense” coming from the hand of Jesus ensures that we do not fall into the error of thinking that God saved us from hell but not from sin reigning in our lives. At the same time, we must also remember Jesus’s words in John 15:5—“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear

much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” Any branch in Him (by grace) that does not bear fruit is cut off (John 15:2). However, any branch that attempts to bear fruit without remaining in Him is “picked up, thrown into the fire and burned” (John 15:6). We can trust our Father, the gardener, to tend to us with all the mercy that is in Christ and to reward us fairly.

Zebulun—“Exalted,” or “Lofty.”

With the birth of her 6th son, Zebulun, Leah felt certain her husband would exalt her (Gen. 30:20). Perhaps she felt certain that any reasonable man had his price, in a sense, that her fruitfulness and achievements would at last overwhelm Jacob’s judgment and cause him to favor her. However, to get a sense of what God means by “exalted,” Isaiah 57:15 is a good starting place:

This is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive

the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

In God’s way of thinking, exaltation is for the benefit of the lowly. Water towers are placed on high hills or structures above the city so that their life-sustaining substance can flow down to those below. Exaltation is not for the one exalted, but for those not exalted. On the day of Pentecost, therefore, Peter spoke of this exalted Son to all the people:

God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear (Acts 2:32, 33).

The exaltation of Jesus, then, resulted in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the first believers. Later, Peter explained to the Sanhedrin that the gifts of repentance and forgiveness were being offered to all men by the exalted Christ:

The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:30, 31).

The message of this Son to all of us who think like Leah is this: “No matter how fruitful you are, no matter how much you achieve, you will not be exalted. Rather, I have been exalted so that you may receive fruit from my Spirit and rest in what I have achieved.”²

Joseph—“Add to,” or “Harvest.”

Joseph was the first son conceived by Rachel and the first son born “not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:13). Leading up to his birth, there is no wrangling among wives, no schemes involving maidservants. Genesis merely says, “Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb...She named him

² “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Joseph, and said, ‘May the LORD add to me another son’” (Gen. 30:22). Though not Jacob’s firstborn, and therefore not Jacob’s heir according to law, Joseph was God’s firstborn, the one chosen to inherit the covenant, the promises, and God Himself. But being the seed of God is no picnic, no Easter parade for, “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it brings forth a harvest” (John 12:24). Joseph was thrown into the earth by his brothers and left for dead; he was sold into slavery; he was accused of other people’s crimes and forgotten.³ The dreams of Joseph were buried in the dungeons of Pharaoh. But because they were, they took root, they flourished, they raised Joseph to the right hand of Pharaoh, and Joseph (the first fruits) saved the world from famine. Then, he brought all the sons of Israel, his brothers, to Egypt to share the glory of his position. “In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering” (Heb. 2:10). Through the death and

³ Gen. 37:23, 28, 31-33; 39:11-15, 19, 20; 40:23.

resurrection of His Son, God has added many, many sons to Rachel.

Benjamin—“Son of My Right Hand.”

Giving birth to Benjamin, her second son, cost Rachel her life: “As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin” (Gen. 35:18). This turn of names is interesting. Ben-Oni means, “Son of My Trouble.” But Benjamin means, “Son of My Right Hand,” or “Son of My Strength.” It truly is a credit to the Father’s strength that He could bring Christ out of the trouble of the cross. “So it will be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:42, 44). In Rachel (which means “ewe”), we see the dishonor and weakness of the cross. In Benjamin, we see the Son whom the Father raised “from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule

and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come” (Eph. 1:20, 21).

Manasseh—“Forget All My Troubles.”

Manasseh was not one of Jacob’s sons. He was Joseph’s. As it was said, Joseph was not Jacob’s legal heir, but when God chose him to be His heir, Jacob followed suit, and Joseph received the double portion that was the birthright of the first born.⁴ This is why Joseph is given two places among the tribes of Israel.

Joseph’s suffering has also been mentioned. “Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, ‘It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household’” (Gen. 41:51). This Son, then, is “a new creation. Old things have passed away. Listen, everything has become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). In Him, the world of trouble and “the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers” have been forgotten (Col. 1:18; 1 Peter 1:18). Because of his

⁴ Deut. 21:17; 1 Chron. 5:1.

hope in the New Creation, Paul wrote, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us” (Rom. 1:18). What is more, when the glory of the New Creation is revealed in us, the first creation will be redeemed. Just as Joseph groaned in prison, waiting for his dreams to come forth, “the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth” as it “waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed” (Rom. 8:19, 22). When the sons of God are revealed, its birth pangs will be forgotten, and “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). Hallelujah!

Israel—“Prince with God,” or “He Overcomes with God.”

To bring this all together, it was never God’s plan to raise up 12 tribes for Himself. Rather, it was always His plan to establish one nation into which He could draw every “tribe and language

and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9). It was for each tribe to put away its family identity, its individual identity, and to identify in the name of their common source and father—Israel. Only God could accomplish such a thing, and to do it required a long process of death for the 12 tribes. The period in Israel’s history from the Red Sea crossing to the crowning of David is the record of that process of death. The time of the judges—a time when the tribes were either fighting amongst themselves or oppressed by their enemies—is probably the darkest point in the transition to unity. It ends with the words, “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). But as the cliché goes, it is darkest just before the dawn, and God finally found “a man after his own heart...to be prince over his people” (1 Sam. 13:14). That man, of course, was David (=“Beloved”).

All Israel came together to David at Hebron and said, ‘We are your own flesh and blood. In the past, even while Saul was king, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns... When all the elders of Israel had

come to King David at Hebron, he made a compact with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel, as the LORD had promised through Samuel (1 Chron. 11:1-3).

In David, all the tribes found one they loved. In joining to David, each one hated his own family line, preferring to say to David, “We are you own flesh and blood” (Luke 14:26; 1 Chron. 11:1). To say it another way, these all left their fathers to be wed to David and to take his family name. It was this decision to deny themselves and follow David that led them to Hebron, which means “Alliance,” or “Unity” (Luke 9:23). This illustrates what was said at the beginning of this section: the New Jerusalem is people, but it is truer to say it is a Person whose members have given up their own lives to be Jesus’s flesh and blood, to be His bride, to be His body. The united cry of this Person is, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Col. 3:11).

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nothing but Christ*

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