Fulfilled Prophecies

Never To Be Found Again: Why Old Covenant Jerusalem Can Never Return



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Many futurists argue that Jerusalem couldn't have been the Babylon of Revelation 18 because the city still exists today. They point to modern Jerusalem and claim that Revelation 18:21 says Babylon would never be found again. Since Jerusalem can still be found on a map, they conclude that the prophecy must refer to another city awaiting destruction.

† But this argument overlooks the covenantal meaning of the

prophecy. The issue wasn't whether people would ever live in Jerusalem again. The issue was whether the old covenant city, with its temple, priesthood, sacrifices, and religious authority, would ever exist again before God (Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 10:9).
† Revelation wasn't predicting that Jerusalem's geographical location would disappear from the earth. It was announcing the permanent destruction of the covenantal system that had rejected and crucified its Messiah (Matthew 23:37-38; Luke 19:41-44).
† The physical location could remain, buildings could be reconstructed, and people could continue living there. But the Jerusalem that represented the old covenant could never return to its former standing before God (Galatians 4:25-26; Hebrews 12:22-24).
† This distinction is essential. The destruction of old covenant Jerusalem in AD 70 wasn't the disappearance of a geographical location. It was the permanent removal of an obsolete covenantal order and the full establishment of the New Jerusalem in Christ (Hebrews 8:13; Revelation 21:2-3).

Revelation 18:21-23
Then a strong angel picked up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will never be found again. And the sound of harpists, musicians, flute players, and trumpeters will never be heard in you again; and no craftsman of any craft will ever be found in you again; and the sound of a mill will never be heard in you again; and the light of a lamp will never shine in you again; and the voice of the groom and bride will never be heard in you again; for your merchants were the powerful people of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your witchcraft.
† The angel's millstone represented an irreversible judgment. Once the stone disappeared beneath the water, it couldn't be recovered. This was prophetic language announcing the permanent overthrow of Babylon's former position and authority

(Jeremiah 51:63-64).
† The expression found no more at all doesn't require the geographical location to disappear. It describes the final removal of the city in the identity and role for which it was being judged (Hebrews 8:13; Revelation 21:1-2).
† The silence of musicians, craftsmen, mills, and wedding celebrations portrayed the complete termination of Babylon's former life. Similar judgment language was used against ancient cities without requiring their geographical locations to vanish forever (Isaiah 13:19-22; Ezekiel 26:13-14).
† Old covenant Jerusalem could never again become God's covenantal dwelling place through the temple, Levitical priesthood, and animal sacrifices. Those things had reached their fulfillment in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7:11-12; Hebrews 10:11-14).
† The prophecy was fulfilled in AD 70 when Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed by the Roman armies. The old covenant religious order was permanently removed, even though the geographical location continued to exist (Luke 21:20-22; Hebrews 8:13).

Revelation 11:8
And their dead bodies will lie on the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.
† Revelation identifies the great city through a specific historical event. It was the city where the Lord was crucified. That points directly to Jerusalem, not a future city in another part of the world (Luke 13:33; Hebrews 13:12).
† Jerusalem was spiritually called Sodom and Egypt because of its rebellion, corruption, and rejection of God's Son. These names described its covenantal condition rather than its geographical location (Isaiah 1:10; Matthew 23:37).
† Revelation's identification of the great city provides an important connection with Babylon in chapter 18. The language of judgment, corruption, and opposition to God's people points to Jerusalem under the old covenant (Revelation 17:6; Matthew

23:34-36).
† The city that rejected its Messiah was facing the covenant judgment Jesus had announced to His own generation (Matthew 23:36; Matthew 24:34).

Revelation 18:24
And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slaughtered on the earth.
† Babylon was held responsible for the blood of God's prophets and saints. Jesus placed that same responsibility upon Jerusalem and the generation that rejected Him (Matthew 23:34-36).
† This connection is significant because Jesus specifically identified Jerusalem as the city that killed the prophets and stoned those sent to her (Luke 13:33-34).
† The judgment of Babylon wasn't disconnected from Israel's covenant history. It was the culmination of the covenant curses that had been announced through Moses and the prophets (Deuteronomy 28:49-52; Luke 21:22).
† The expression all that have been slain upon the earth reflects the comprehensive responsibility assigned to the guilty city. Jesus had already declared that the righteous blood shed upon the earth would come upon that generation (Matthew 23:35-36).

Matthew 23:37-38
Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!
† Jesus didn't pronounce this judgment against Rome, New York, or some unidentified future Babylon. He addressed Jerusalem directly and announced that its house would be left desolate (Luke 19:41-44).
† The house represented the temple and the religious order centered upon it. Its desolation meant that the old covenant

system had reached its appointed end (Matthew 24:1-2; Hebrews 8:13).
† Jesus had already declared that the kingdom would be taken from the unfaithful leaders and given to a people producing its fruit. The old covenant leadership couldn't retain its former authority after rejecting the Son (Matthew 21:42-43).
† When the temple was destroyed in AD 70, the judgment Jesus had announced was visibly demonstrated. The old covenant house wasn't awaiting restoration because Christ had established the greater and permanent dwelling place of God (Ephesians 2:19-22; Hebrews 12:22-24).

Luke 21:20-22
But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are inside the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of punishment, so that all things which have been written will be fulfilled.
† Jesus identified the approaching destruction of Jerusalem by describing armies surrounding the city. This was a recognizable historical event, not an unspecified catastrophe thousands of years later (Matthew 24:15-16).
† The disciples were instructed to flee because the judgment would occur within their historical circumstances. They weren't told to watch for a future worldwide destruction of the planet (Luke 21:32).
† Jesus described those events as days of vengeance when the written judgments would be fulfilled. Jerusalem's destruction was the culmination of the covenant warnings against Israel's unfaithfulness (Deuteronomy 28:49-52; Daniel 9:26-27).
† The Roman destruction in AD 70 brought an end to the functioning temple and its sacrifices. That historical event demonstrated the permanent passing away of the old covenant order (Hebrews 9:8-10; Hebrews 10:9).

Jeremiah 51:63-64
And as soon as you finish reading this scroll, you shall tie a stone to it and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates, and say, 'Just so shall Babylon sink down and not rise again, because of the disaster that I am going to bring upon her; and they will become exhausted.'" To this point are the words of Jeremiah.
† Revelation's millstone imagery comes from Jeremiah's judgment against ancient Babylon. The stone being thrown into the water represented the permanent overthrow of Babylon's power and dominion (Revelation 18:21).
† Ancient Babylon's geographical location didn't need to disappear for the prophecy to be fulfilled. What ended was Babylon's position as a ruling imperial power (Isaiah 13:19; Jeremiah 50:39-40).
† Revelation applies this established prophetic pattern to the great city facing judgment in the first century. The imagery describes irreversible destruction, not the removal of a location from every future map (Revelation 17:18; Revelation 18:21).
† If futurists insist that Jerusalem must physically disappear to fulfill Revelation, they must explain why the same prophetic language was used against ancient Babylon without requiring the land itself to cease existing (Jeremiah 51:26; Jeremiah 51:63-64).

Ezekiel 26:13-14
So I will put an end to the sound of your songs, and the sound of your harps will no longer be heard. I will turn you into a bare rock; you will become a dry place for the spreading of nets. You will not be rebuilt, for I the Lord have spoken," declares the Lord God.
† Ezekiel used language remarkably similar to Revelation when announcing judgment against Tyre. Music would cease, and the city would no longer exist in its former glory (Revelation 18:22).
† Yet the geographical location of Tyre remains identifiable today. The prophecy's language concerned the overthrow of the condemned city and its former status, not the disappearance of

the coastline itself (Ezekiel 26:3-5).
† This establishes an important principle of prophetic interpretation. The continued existence of a geographical location doesn't automatically invalidate a prophecy announcing that a city would never rise again in its former identity (Jeremiah 51:64; Revelation 18:21).
† The same principle applies to Jerusalem. The old covenant city was judged and removed from its covenantal position, even though people continued living in the same geographical area (Galatians 4:25-26; Hebrews 8:13).

Hebrews 8:13
When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is about to disappear.
† Hebrews explains exactly why old covenant Jerusalem could never return. God had established a new covenant through Jesus Christ, making the first covenant obsolete (Hebrews 8:6-12).
† The old covenant was approaching its final disappearance when Hebrews was written. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 brought that transitional period to its historical conclusion (Hebrews 9:8-10; Matthew 24:2).
† The old covenant wasn't temporarily suspended so that God could restore it thousands of years later. It had been fulfilled and replaced by the better covenant established through Christ (Hebrews 7:22; Hebrews 10:9).
† Rebuilding a physical temple couldn't restore the covenant that God had declared obsolete. Christ's sacrifice accomplished what the repeated animal sacrifices could never accomplish (Hebrews 10:11-14).

Hebrews 10:9
then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will." He takes away the first in order to establish the second.
† The first covenant was removed so that the second could be established. Scripture doesn't describe two competing covenant

systems that would alternate throughout history (Hebrews 8:6-7).
† Jesus fulfilled the Law and accomplished the redemption toward which its sacrifices and ceremonies had pointed. Returning to the old system would deny the finality of His completed work (Matthew 5:17; Colossians 2:16-17).
† The old covenant temple, priesthood, and sacrifices weren't intended to remain permanent institutions. They were shadows pointing to the reality found in Christ (Hebrews 9:11-12; Hebrews 10:1).
† This is why old covenant Jerusalem can never be found again. Its covenantal purpose has been completed, and its former religious authority cannot be restored by human construction (Hebrews 7:12; Hebrews 10:18).

Galatians 4:25-26
Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is enslaved with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.
† Paul distinguished between two Jerusalems. One represented the old covenant and its bondage, while the other represented the freedom of the new covenant in Christ (Galatians 4:21-24).
† The Jerusalem that existed in Paul's day was associated with Mount Sinai and the covenant that was passing away. Its geographical existence didn't guarantee its continuing covenantal standing before God (2 Corinthians 3:7-11).
† The Jerusalem above wasn't another physical city awaiting construction. It represented the heavenly covenantal reality established through Christ (Hebrews 12:22-24).
† The New Jerusalem didn't need to replace the old city's geographical location. It replaced the old covenant relationship with a greater and permanent relationship between God and His people (Ephesians 2:18-22; Revelation 21:3).

Hebrews 12:22-24
But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the

general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

† The writer of Hebrews told believers that they had already come to the heavenly Jerusalem. He didn't tell them to wait thousands of years for a physical city to descend onto the earth (Galatians 4:26).

† Their access to the heavenly city was through Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant. This was a spiritual and covenantal reality, not a promise of renewed Levitical sacrifices (Hebrews 9:15; Hebrews 10:19-22).

† The heavenly Jerusalem is the city of the living God, where His people have fellowship with Him through Christ (Ephesians 2:18-22).

† The old Jerusalem could be destroyed, but the heavenly Jerusalem belonged to the kingdom that couldn't be shaken (Hebrews 12:27-28).

Revelation 21:1-3

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among the people, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

† Revelation presents the New Jerusalem after the judgment of Babylon. This contrast is deliberate. The unfaithful city was judged, while the faithful bride was revealed in her new covenant glory (Revelation 19:7-9).

† The New Jerusalem is described as a bride, demonstrating that the vision concerns God's redeemed people and their covenant relationship with Christ, not merely buildings and streets (Revelation 21:9-10; Ephesians 5:25-27).

† The new heaven and new earth represent the completed covenantal order in which God's dwelling place is with His people. The old order of separation, condemnation, and temple restrictions had passed away (Isaiah 65:17; Hebrews 9:8; Ephesians 2:18).
† The New Jerusalem didn't emerge from the physical rubble of Jerusalem as a reconstructed earthly capital. It came from God as the fulfilled spiritual reality that the old city and temple had foreshadowed (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22).
† This is the permanent answer to the destruction of Babylon. The old covenant city could never return because God's people now belong to the New Jerusalem established through Jesus Christ (Revelation 22:14; Hebrews 12:28).

Revelation 21:22-23
I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illuminated it, and its lamp is the Lamb.
† The New Jerusalem has no physical temple because God and the Lamb are its temple. This directly contradicts the expectation that another earthly temple must become the center of God's covenantal presence (John 4:21-24).
† The old temple was a temporary structure that pointed forward to the greater reality accomplished in Christ. Once the reality arrived, the shadow no longer held covenantal authority (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 9:11-12).
† The light of the New Jerusalem comes from God's glory and the Lamb. God's people no longer depend upon the old covenant sanctuary for access to His presence (Ephesians 2:18; Hebrews 10:19-22).
† A modern building in Jerusalem, regardless of its size or religious significance, can't restore the old covenant. God's dwelling place is now with His redeemed people through Christ (1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:21-22).

Revelation 22:14-17
Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life, and may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral persons, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you of these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires, take the water of life without cost.
† The New Jerusalem is presented with open access to the tree of life for those who belong to Christ. Its blessings are available through the gospel, not through returning to the old covenant (John 4:13-14; Revelation 21:25).
† The invitation to come demonstrates the continuing availability of salvation through Jesus Christ. The New Jerusalem isn't an abandoned city waiting for a future generation to discover it (John 7:37-39).
† The old Jerusalem excluded people through covenantal boundaries and temple restrictions. In Christ, believing Jews and Gentiles have access to the Father through the same Spirit (Ephesians 2:14-18).
† The old covenant city was judged and removed from its former standing. The New Jerusalem remains the permanent home of God's redeemed people (Hebrews 12:22-28).

Historical References
† Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, Book 6, Chapters 4-5, described the burning of Jerusalem's temple in AD 70 and the devastation accompanying the Roman conquest.
† Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, Book 7, Chapter 1, recorded the destruction of Jerusalem's buildings and walls, demonstrating the severity of the city's historical judgment.
† Tacitus, Histories, Book 5, Chapters 10-13, described the Roman campaign against Jerusalem and the circumstances surrounding the siege. His account provides additional historical

context for the catastrophe.
† Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapters 5-7, connected Jerusalem's destruction with the judgment announced by Jesus and described the suffering that came upon the city.
† These historical writers establish that Jerusalem and its temple suffered catastrophic destruction in the first century. The covenantal significance of that destruction is explained by Scripture itself (Luke 21:20-22; Hebrews 8:13).

How It Applies To Us Today
† We don't need to look for another Babylon, another temple, or another destruction of Jerusalem to complete the prophecies Jesus gave to His first-century disciples (Matthew 24:34; Revelation 22:6).
† Modern Jerusalem's existence doesn't overturn Revelation 18. The old covenant city was judged in its former covenantal identity, not erased from geographical existence (Galatians 4:25-26; Hebrews 8:13).
† We don't approach God through a physical temple, a Levitical priesthood, or animal sacrifices. We approach Him through Jesus Christ, our permanent High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16; Hebrews 10:19-22).
† We belong to the kingdom that cannot be shaken. Our hope isn't the restoration of old covenant Jerusalem but the permanent reality of the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-28).
† The New Jerusalem is the dwelling place of God with His people. Its gates remain open, and the invitation of the gospel continues to call people to Christ (Revelation 21:25; Revelation 22:17).
† The old covenant system can never be found again because its purpose was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. What God has completed doesn't need to be repeated (Hebrews 10:9-14).

Q & A Appendix

Q: If Revelation says Babylon will never be found again, why does Jerusalem still exist today?
A: Because the prophecy concerns the permanent destruction of Jerusalem in its old covenant identity and authority, not the disappearance of its geographical location. The old covenant became obsolete, and Christ established the new covenant (Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 10:9).

Q: Doesn't the continued existence of Jerusalem prove that Revelation 18 hasn't been fulfilled?
A: No. Biblical prophets used similar judgment language against ancient Babylon and Tyre. Their geographical locations remained identifiable even after their former power and status were destroyed (Jeremiah 51:63-64; Ezekiel 26:13-14).

Q: How do we know Babylon represents Jerusalem?
A: Revelation identifies the great city as the place where the Lord was crucified. It also attributes the blood of the prophets to Babylon, just as Jesus attributed that responsibility to Jerusalem and His generation (Revelation 11:8; Revelation 18:24; Matthew 23:35-37).

Q: Could a future temple restore old covenant Jerusalem?
A: No. Jesus fulfilled the old covenant sacrificial system, and His sacrifice was offered once for all. A new physical building couldn't restore a covenant God had made obsolete (Hebrews 7:12; Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 10:11-18).

Q: Was the New Jerusalem physically rebuilt from the ruins of the old city?
A: No. Although the geographical city was later rebuilt, Revelation describes the New Jerusalem as coming down from heaven from God. It represents the new covenant people of God, not merely reconstructed buildings (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 21:2).

Q: Does the New Jerusalem exist today?
A: Yes. Believers have come to the heavenly Jerusalem through Jesus Christ, and God's dwelling place is with His people under the new covenant (Hebrews 12:22-24; Ephesians 2:19-22; Revelation 21:3).

Q: Will there be another future destruction of Jerusalem to fulfill Revelation 18?
A: No. The covenantal judgment announced by Jesus was fulfilled in His generation. Revelation's judgment of Babylon belongs to that completed first-century fulfillment, not another future covenantal judgment (Matthew 23:36; Matthew 24:34; Luke 21:20-22).

Q: What does never to be found again ultimately mean?
A: It means that old covenant Jerusalem, as the center of God's covenantal administration through the Law, temple, priesthood, and sacrifices, has permanently passed away. God's people now belong to the New Jerusalem through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 10:9; Hebrews 12:22-24).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† Revelation 18:21-23; Revelation 11:8; Revelation 18:24; Matthew 23:37-38; Luke 21:20-22; Jeremiah 51:63-64; Ezekiel 26:13-14; Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 10:9; Galatians 4:25-26; Hebrews 12:22-24; Revelation 21:1-3; Revelation 21:22-23; Revelation 22:14-17
† Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, Book 6, Chapters 4-5; The Jewish War, Book 7, Chapter 1; Tacitus, Histories, Book 5, Chapters 10-13; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapters 5-7

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