

City Of Peace

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There is a city in the world that is cursed by violent crime such as assault, murder, rape, robbery, burglary, and theft of property like most cities. This city is Jerusalem. The confusion that surrounds the earthly city of Jerusalem today typifies the condition of religion around the world. So in one sense, earthly Jerusalem already stands as the religious capital of the world—of Satan's world. There is Judaism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, even Buddhism, Hinduism, and Marxism. And the list goes on and on as to what is in that city.

Just like our own lives, even the name of Israel's capital, Jerusalem, was not set in stone from creation, but was shaped by future events and actions, no doubt controlled by God. But nevertheless it took a while for those events and actions to shape the name of that city.

Turn with me, please, to Genesis 14. Jerusalem is mentioned by name over 600 times throughout the books of the Old Testament but not one of those mentions can be found in the first five books of the Bible written by Moses. Now, instead, Jerusalem is referred to by other names.

Genesis 14:18 Then Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High.

Now we are going to be flipping to several scriptures here real quick just to set this foundation here. Go now to Hebrews 7 and verse 1. The biblical origins of Jerusalem trace back to the ancient Canaanite site of Salem and the city of the priestly king Melchizedek. The king of Salem by name is the king of righteousness and by office is the king of peace.

Hebrews 7:1-2 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part

of all, first being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning "king of peace."

So of course, that is talking about Jesus Christ there.

How do we know that Salem, which means both peace and completion, refers to the future city of Jerusalem? Well, King David announced that the Temple would be built there, to begin with.

Psalm 76:1-2 In Judah God is known; His name is great in Israel. In Salem also is His tabernacle, and His dwelling place in Zion.

Another name for Jerusalem is Moriah, as we see from the next two scriptures.

Genesis 22:2 Then He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

II Chronicles 3:1 Now Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father David.

So you see there the connection of Moriah being the *Mount* Moriah and there the house of the Lord, the Temple, and Tabernacle at Jerusalem.

It is commonly believed that Abraham offered up Isaac upon the mount in Moriah, which is known to be the same mount on which Jesus Christ was crucified. Now the land of Moriah refers to all the mountains of Jerusalem, which would include Mount Guyon or Calvary, and the mount of Sion and of Akra. Mount Calvary is the highest ground to the west, and the mount of the Temple is the lowest of the mounts.

Now, Beersheba, where Abraham lived, is about forty-two miles from Jerusalem. It is no wonder that Abraham, Isaac, the two servants, and the donkey laden with wood for the burnt offering, did not reach this place until

the third day. The place of the sacrifice cannot be positively identified, but II Chronicles 3:1 seems to locate it on the site of Solomon's Temple. Tradition has held held to this view, and it would be difficult to find a more logical spot.

The first time that the name Jerusalem has ever mentioned by that name with which we are familiar is in the book of Joshua here.

Joshua 10:1 Now it came to pass when Adoni-Zedek [The second portion of that name, Zedek, is important to remember because you will also remember, it is Melchizedek.] king of Jerusalem, heard how Joshua had taken Ai and had utterly destroyed it—as he had done to Jericho and its king, so he had done to Ai and its king—and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were among them.

Notice that both rulers of Jerusalem that we have so far encountered have the word zedek, meaning justice, in their name, Melchizedek and Adoni-Zedek.

The history of Jerusalem from the time of Joshua to its destruction by Titus, a period of fifteen centuries, is a succession of changes, revolutions, sieges, surrenders, and famines. It was not a peaceful city at all, to say the least. Each is followed by restoration and rebuilding. The city's greatest physical glory was reached under the reign of King Solomon, who built the Temple and the royal palace, besides greatly enlarging and strengthening the walls of the city.

One of Jerusalem's greatest humiliations was reached under the reign of Antiochus Epiphanies in 175-165 BC when the most violent and cruel efforts were made to destroy the Jews, their religion, and Jerusalem.

As we continue to build this background, another person identified as king in Jerusalem also has zedek in his name in II Kings 24. We are going to read verse 18. We always say Zedekiah, but he has zedek-iah. There is a zedek in that name as well.

II Kings 24:18 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, pronounced in the Hebrew as Ye-rush-a-lay-im, implies a place of divine peace and completion. That is what that means. Its ultimate destiny is to be the City of Peace. But peace is an ending place, not a starting point, and peace is the result of doing the right thing and securing a just completion. That definition is right in the name in the Hebrew of Jerusalem.

Sometimes the only avenue to real peace leads through the pain of conflict, because a peace without justice is no peace at all, which we are beginning to find very quickly in this nation as our corrupt justices rule in ridiculous ways more every day. Peace without justice is a temporary ceasefire and not much more. Today's ceasefire is the most common form of agreement in Israel. How many times do we hear there is another ceasefire in Israel or in Jerusalem or in that area in the Middle East? So they are believing that they are getting peace, but it is only a temporary peace, and it is not a true peace.

The name Jerusalem could not be bestowed on that special place until the Israelites arrived in the land and under Joshua's leadership followed God's command. The religious significance of Jerusalem first became apparent when David conquered the city and established it as the capital of Israel. God's inspiration of David's decision to secure Israel's throne in Jerusalem, established Jerusalem as the permanent home of Israel's human monarchs. The establishment of divine and human kingship in Jerusalem was furthered by the construction of Solomon's temple, and God brought the nation of Israel to its economic zenith using Solomon, as we all well know.

With the nation secure on all sides, Solomon built a permanent temple palace for God. But God's use of this palace was conditional on Israel's obedience and righteousness, which Israel did for a short while. Thus, during Solomon's reign, Jerusalem reached its physical high point. Jerusalem was so prominent in the imagination of the Israelites that it came to serve as a figure of speech that represented the whole nation. All twelve tribes in God's administration of blessings and curses on Jerusalem was perceived as salvation and judgment on the entire nation. Blessings were salvation, curses were judgment.

On the one hand, the prophets warned that God would withdraw His presence from Jerusalem as a result of Israel's enduring apostasy. As a result,

the Babylonians defeated Jerusalem in 586 BC and took the people of Judah into exile. Now the destruction of Jerusalem symbolized the rejection and removal of Israel for her sin. The blessings that once existed in the city were gone. In verses 26-27 of II Kings 23, the caption of this section of my Bible says Impending Judgment on Judah.

II Kings 23:26-27 Nevertheless the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. And the Lord said, "I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, "My name shall be there."

So at this point, Jerusalem is no longer the holy city. God was the one who chose it, and He had the right to cast it off—and He did it because of the sinful nation. Remember earlier I said that the agreement, the covenant that they had was conditional and they broke that condition, that contract.

On the other hand, Israel's hopes for restoration from exile were expressed by the image of a restored Jerusalem. This was what encouraged them: the thought that it would be restored again. When Israel returned from exile in 539-538 BC, rebuilding the Temple and city was among the top priorities of those who returned from exile. In Ezra 1 is at the end of the Babylonian captivity where Cyrus, the King of Persia, begins to send them back.

Ezra 1:1-5 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying,

Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house in Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. And whoever is

left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the free will offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.

Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.

So you remember that same thing happened under Solomon. God put His Spirit in those artisans and those construction workers and those skilled workers so that they would have an extra skill, a higher level of perfected skill, to build His house, God's house, and He was doing the same here with all those whose spirits God had moved. So He had moved them to be enthusiastic, to contribute their wealth, whatever they had, because they had been slaves for a while. And that is what they did—enthusiastically. We, as God's people, should have the same attitude toward God's church and be just as enthusiastic as those Jews did in going back to rebuild their temple.

Restoration of the nation was inconceivable without the reestablishment of Jerusalem as the seat of divine and Davidic kingship. From the time when David brought the Ark of God into the city until the destruction by Nebuchadnezzar, the city was continually added to and embellished. There were such notable improvements as Hezekiah's vast structures for aqueducts and water supply and the enclosing with an outside wall of Zion and the city of David. During the years immediately succeeding the capture of the city by Nebuchadnezzar, it lay in ruins. As we just read in the book of Ezra, Cyrus the Great decreed that the return of the captive Jews to their city and the rebuilding of the walls, which by Nehemiah's time had been broken down for 140 years, under Nehemiah the city regained much of its former splendor.

So Jerusalem's history was one of building up and tearing down and building up and tearing down, and it all revolved around breaking the covenant. It all revolved around the sinfulness of Israel and Judah. Hundreds of years later, after Octavian Augustus (and by the way, Augustus was a family name synonymous with the word Caesar), established himself as ruler of the

Roman world and restored order to the empire. And after Herod the Great established himself as king in Jerusalem, the city was again restored to much of its former grandeur.

Now under Herod the Temple was enlarged and beautified, and it was in this state that Christ found the city of Jerusalem. Under Herod the city was given a better water supply. Under Herod's grandson, Herod Agrippa in AD 41, the area inside the city wall was doubled. The history of the city of Jerusalem has one major consistency, and that was not that it was a city of peace. That was the last thing that you could attach to that city most of the time. Even under Israel and Judah, Jerusalem's former splendor and grandeur gave way to sin time and time again. This resulted in Jerusalem's going into tribulation, war, pestilence, and disease, consistently devastating the city.

Under most of the kings of Judah and in later centuries down through today, Jerusalem was anything but peaceful. It has been one conflict after another all the way down through the ages. It is a sad shame that the Israelites were never able to get their act together. To this day, you look at this nation and all these English speaking nations and those others who are the descendants of the Israelites, and still, after 6,000 years almost, cannot just get it together and stop that. So war and devastation has been more part of the title of Jerusalem than the City of Peace.

Let us shift gears here and look at positive spiritual aspects such as symbolism and imagery connected with Jerusalem. Please turn with me to Psalm 122 and we will be here for quite a while. Now David may have written Psalm 122 and I think most people believe he did, both to express joy in his new capital city and to encourage love for and loyalty toward it as the focal point of the nation's political life and worship. Jeroboam later tried to undermine that unity by establishing his capital at Shechem and by building alternate worship centers of Dan and Beersheba. Simply appeasing the inhabitants, as Jeroboam tried to do, did not lead to a peace and unity. But David's attitude and reason was good and humble and dedicated to God and it led to peace and completion based on a godly vision of justice. So this is where we think that David having written this is coming from.

Psalm 122:1-9 [The caption here is the Joy of Going to the House of the Lord, A song of Ascents. Of David.] I was glad when they

said to me, "Let us go into the house of the Lord." Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem! Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together, when the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to the Testimony of Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord. For thrones are set there for judgment, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, prosperity within your palaces." For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, "Peace be within you." Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek your good.

He sounds desperate to have peace in Jerusalem, does he not? Three times in those three verses he is asking for peace. So obviously, he has been watching a non-peaceful city for quite a while, and God answered his prayer for a while. Psalm 122 may be looked at in three very different ways, all with good biblical justification.

First, it can be looked at literally. It is about earthly Jerusalem growing out of David's hopes, or a later poet's remembrance. The second way is symbolically. It can be applied to the church as Paul, the author of Hebrews, applies it specifically in chapter 12 of Hebrews. And third, it can be applied prophetically. Psalm 122 can direct our thinking to the New Jerusalem, of which the earthly city is but an incomplete type.

So God commanded Joshua to destroy the Gentile inhabitants of Jerusalem before the Israelites could move in to it. Simply appeasing the inhabitants that were there would not have led to a peace and completion based on the godly vision of justice. They had to be removed because they would have had an influence that would have done what the nations around Israel did. All the Gentile nations and their pagan gods and Israel continually went after the Baal gods and so forth.

When the Tabernacle temple was first placed in Jerusalem under Joshua, the city signified peace and completion in physical Israel. But because the Israelites sinned over hundreds of years during the times of the judges and eventually went into captivity, conflicted Jerusalem was unable to retain its image as the City of Peace, and since its loss of its City of Peace moniker and blessing because of sin, God's people look to the future when the New

Jerusalem will be eternally peaceful and complete. Because in looking at Jerusalem as it is today, it has never managed to be that, except for very short times under righteous kings.

In our personal lives as well, we sometimes make the mistake of avoiding conflict, thinking it will lead to peace. While we certainly should not be unnecessarily aggressive, if we make peace the primary objective at which we aim, we will end up either being submissive or fighting a much harder battle down the road. And so when God gave this nation to the children of Israel once again and they mistakenly and cruelly got rid of many of the Native Americans that were here. But that was not what God wanted, I do not believe. I think that they were supposed to just move them out by migration rather than kill them off or to be more merciful. But they took the human viewpoint of it, and they took the wrong way and caused a lot of suffering—and they did not solve the problem. So anyway, that is one example of it.

So for the sake of a more lasting peace, when we apply God's vision of justice or, in other words, when we uphold God's righteous standards, we save ourselves from worse future conflict. That goes for every group of people, no matter how small, including your own family. If you are the father of your family and you do not uphold the standard, you are going to have conflict in your family and the same with the mother and then the single mother as well, or the single father. So standards must be upheld in our families just as they need to be in the nation.

In contrast, in many of the psalms, Jerusalem is lauded as a truly holy city, the city of God. For example, in the psalms of Zion, Psalm 46, Psalm 48, Psalms 76, 84, 87, or the psalms of ascents. Sadly, Jerusalem was still only an earthly city, and the people themselves were far from holy which is why, in the end, the city was overthrown by God's determined judgment and the people were deported to Babylon. We are just waiting to see what God's judgment is going to be on *this* nation. It has already started. You can see the problems that are happening already, things that are falling apart, our political system and all of the rest of it.

What is that big thing that God is going to bring upon this nation? We can look back at the prophecies of ancient Israel and Judah and we can get a

pretty good idea that He has unlimited ways of bringing judgment upon the nation. So we should pray for our leaders and pray for one another and pray for the people in this nation that they will repent.

At its best Jerusalem was only a weak type of the heavenly city to come, but it still caused joy in the heart of the arriving Israelite pilgrim, which is what the opening verses of Psalm 122 describe. Now we can imagine the writer standing inside the gates of the city after his long journey, looking around at the stately government buildings, the homes of the wealthy Jerusalem residents, and the city's massive walls, and marveling. This is broadening this here, I believe David wrote that, but he is writing it for anyone coming to the city to be able to read and have this feeling of joy. He has come from the country, this traveler, and has never seen a real city before, let alone Jerusalem. We catch a glimpse of this wonder from the disciples comments to Jesus when they were leaving the Temple to go to the Mount of Olives and they said something like, Look, Teacher, what massive stones and what magnificent buildings. In the ESV this is the way it is worded:

Mark 13:1-2 (ESV) And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

So sadly, Jesus warned of a time not far off when it would all come to destruction, and that happened in 70 AD. And I think it was a year before that the church was told to flee from Jerusalem and get out of there and go to Pella, and they were out of that. God took them out of that city, Jerusalem, long before it was destroyed and the Temple as well was destroyed.

There were three things that impressed David the Psalmist as he stood joyfully inside the city's gates and walls. The first thing that impressed David was its unity.

Psalm 122:3-4 Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together, where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to the Testimony of Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord.

When the psalmist refers to Jerusalem as a city that is closely compacted together, there are a couple of things he could be writing about there depending on who wrote the psalm and when it was written. If it was written by David and was therefore written rather early in the history of the monarchy, the writer could be referring to the physical setting of the city.

During David's reign and for some time thereafter, Jerusalem was a small city located on the crest of Mount Zion and Mount Moriah, bounded by two sides by steep descents to the Kidron and the Tyropoeon valleys, and thus no more than a half a mile wide. So it had a dramatic setting for one approaching it from a distance, and its tight structure would have impressed anyone observing it. On the other hand, if the psalm was written later, perhaps even after the return of the Jews from exile, the city would have been larger, and the reference of its being compacted together would refer to the orderly rows of fine houses bordering its narrow, twisted streets. So if it was written even later than this, it might refer to the way new homes had now replaced the rubble-filled lots left behind after the Babylonian desolation.

Yet the psalmist is not thinking merely in physical terms, as we might be inclined to do if we were analyzing it without God's Holy Spirit. So he notices the physical compactness of the city, but it is merely an appropriate way of noting that the role Jerusalem had played in the compacting or unifying of the nation. So the compacting was more of a unifying type of situation than it was one of crampedness or of just rebuilding over top of or in a small valley.

At one time, the people had thought more in terms of their tribal identities than their national identity, and that had still been a problem. There were twelve tribes. In fact, even after David had become king, there was intense rivalry between the tribe of Judah and Benjamin. David had come from the tribe of Benjamin, which was the tribe of his adversary and predecessor Saul. Jebusite Jerusalem was a border town that belonged to none of the existing tribes. No one could lay claim to it. So by choosing it as his capital, David chose under God's direction, a city that would belong to the entire nation. So here, people from each of the tribes could go up and know that he or she belonged to the one united people. People from Judah and Benjamin, Dan, Ephraim, Manasseh, Reuben, Naphtali, and the other four or five tribes—

they could all go to a place that was nobody else's. It was not another tribe's, it was just there for everyone. And that is where David had chosen that site.

More important, the reason for their going up was to worship the one true God of the nation, Yahweh, who had called them into existence by His blessing on Abraham and by His deliverance of the people from Egypt and by giving the people His laws at Mount Sinai. So the unity of the nation was not merely political. In fact, that was a minor aspect of it. In fact, the outward political unity fractured early on, in the days of Rehoboam, Solomon's son and successor. The real unity was spiritual because regardless of the tribal or political divisions, every Israelite came to Jerusalem to worship one true and the same God.

Now the second thing that impressed David about Jerusalem was its justice.

Psalm 122:5 For thrones are set there for judgment, the thrones of the house of David.

The reference to God's statute or law in verse 4 also leads the writer to think of how Jerusalem was the center for dispersing legal justice to the people. That was what was in David's mind and that God had put there, and it was an extremely important aspect of it. Now thrones in verse 5, may be a reference to the king's courts located in the palace of the monarch or in other government buildings. But they may be something more, something the pilgrims saw as he or she passed through the gates of the capital city. We remember that when when Absalom was trying to win the allegiance of the people, he turned them from obeying and serving his father, David. He stood in the gates of the city to offer judgment to those who came to it with their legal suits.

Judgment was often rendered at the city's gates and thrones for judgment may be something pilgrims noticed when they entered the city. Dispensing justice is a ruler's first duty and best gift. Dispensing justice is one of the two God-given functions of right government. And what does our government not have right now? It lacks justice. The other is defending the citizens against violence from either within or from without. And so our leaders are

failing miserably. President Trump is trying to do the best he can as a worldly person who is rough around the edges. But he cannot solve the problems. He is improving a few things, but he cannot solve them.

When the kings of Israel took this responsibility seriously and gave just judgments, the city and nation were blessed by God and prospered, and when they neglected this duty, the nation was troubled and the result was often civil war, as in the days of David and his rebellious son, Absalom.

The third thing that impressed David was the need for peace.

Psalm 122:6-8 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, prosperity within your palaces." For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, "Peace be within you."

It may be a sober realization of how difficult it is to provide genuine true justice in this world that leads the psalmist to compose the prayer and write the vow of the psalm's last stanza. There can be no true or lasting peace without justice and justice is hard for humans to achieve. Which may be an understatement unless they have God's Holy Spirit.

Now this is not a one-time prayer or idle words unmatched by deeds. Here in verse 9, the psalmist wants to work for the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem too and then he ends his composition with a vow.

Psalm 122:9 Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.

So he gives him his strongest promise there that he would do that. We have to make the same promise in God's church. That very same one, "I will seek your good" for the benefit of the church, for the benefit of the kingdom, for the benefit, if we were there as Israelites, of Jerusalem. It is a firm resolve. No city has ever been a center for such fierce military battles, destruction, and loss of life as Jerusalem has been. Its very name incorporates the rich Hebrew word for peace, Shalom, meaning "habitation of peace." But no habitation has ever been less peaceful. It has been attacked and destroyed time after time after time.

Now the church of God and Jesus Christ is for us what Jerusalem was for ancient Israel. And it is a tremendous step beyond it as the author of Hebrews points out to the Israelite believers of his day. The ancient city with its Temple and temple worship was a wonderful gift of God to be highly valued and loved, but something much better has come by the work of Jesus Christ. Jesus has established a new spiritual temple by the sacrifice of Himself on the cross. He has brought us, not to Mount Sinai or to the old Mount Zion, but to a new Mount Zion and a new Jerusalem.

Please to Isaiah 1. Zion is sometimes used metaphorically, at other times topographically, while the designation has changed across time. Originally, Zion was equated with the City of David, signifying the southeast hill of Jerusalem. The Temple Mount to its north was also known as Zion. From the Byzantine period, Zion has been applied to the hill south of the southwest corner of the existing Old City. Zion also designates Jerusalem as a religious capital and has references to the church.

Earthly Jerusalem, the fair skinned daughter Zion, has taken on the tragic and weathered likeness of Hagar from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery as in Galatians 4:24-25.

Isaiah 1:7-8 Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; strangers devour your land in your presence; and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. So the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a hut in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.

The image is analogous to Isaiah's comparing Zion with its walls evacuated by exile, to an abandoned wife, or a bereaved and barren mother. This is where Jerusalem has come to.

Isaiah 49:14 But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me."

The imagery of Mount Sinai represents the Old Covenant, while Mount Zion represents the New Covenant that takes its place. Heavenly Jerusalem is the name given to our eternal home in glory and also sometimes a reference to the church.

Hebrews 12:18-21 For you have not come to the mountain [that is Mount Sinai] that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot by an arrow." And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.")

So the heavenly Jerusalem is the place of the New Covenant, sealed through the blood of Christ. The elect of God have no connection with an earthly city. As the author of Hebrews put it,

Hebrews 13:14 For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.

So the city to come will stand forever. But no earthly city is enduring; all earthly cities are temporary, but we are looking for an abiding city to come. Most people love the focus on earthly security, but the best earthly security is at best insecure. Who knows of any earthly security of any way—no matter what sized nation it is or what sized army it is, or what the technology is—who truly feels secure? You know, we can project out just in the way of science fiction, and you see these movies where the aliens are coming to the earth and in some of the more advanced ones sometimes earth has a dome that it puts over itself, but the aliens always seem to break through, so it does not matter what the technology is. We even realize that there is no such thing as security here on earth, other than if you are in the church, you have God's Holy Spirit, and you know that you have security.

The Jews fruitlessly put their efforts into maintaining their grip on a fleeting earthly city, but we must earnestly endeavor to strive for the long-lasting one.

The name Zion and Jerusalem often stand for the body of citizens, even when far away in exile, the whole of Judah, the whole of Israel, or the entire people of God. So Jerusalem is at the same time the place of Jewish unfaithfulness and disobedience, and also the place of God's election, presence, protection, and glory. It all depends on whether it is the earthly Jerusalem or the spiritual Jerusalem. The process of history demonstrated the unfaithfulness and disobedience, which inevitably provoked divine anger and punishment. The glories of the city can only lie in the future, in the heavenly Jerusalem, not in the earthly Jerusalem.

Picture this, if you will.

Hebrews 12:22-24 But you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks of better things than that of Abel.

Hebrews 12:28-29 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.

If He passes judgment on someone, that is the way He does it, or that is the way He is able to do it if He should so decide.

This Jerusalem, the church, has important parallels to the Jerusalem that was the destiny of the pilgrims and the subject matter of the psalm. It, too, is a compacted, unifying place where people from various human tribes can come together and be one people.

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Our Jerusalem is also a place where justice has been provided and should be worked for still. We should not take it for granted. We should work for that justice. And the way that we work for that justice is to put on Christ, to imitate Him, to follow His example, and to glorify God in our every minute of every day.

Should we not pray for the peace of our Jerusalem? Conflicts erupt in the church just as they do in other places. Our Jerusalem is also a place where justice has been provided and should be worked for. God has justified us through the atoning death of Jesus Christ, our Savior, and we are to be concerned for justice too in the church above all but also, where possible, in society as well. For example, the troubles that disturbed the church of Philippi or of Paul's plea to your Euodia and Syntyche, he said to agree with each other in the Lord. That is the way Paul worded it.

Philippians 4:2 I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

So if we do not have peace in the church or we have conflict, then we do not have the same mind in the Lord as much as we should, if we have any. So that is something we have to work for and work toward and make a great effort to do.

The one evidence of our connection with that glorious city is that our concern or interest is focused on the peace of God's Zion, that is, of God's church. So when you get into an argument or discussion or difference of opinion, or you get offended at something somebody else said and all, is your first reaction to try to bring peace, or is it a gut reaction where you just want to get back at or you are angry at that person for the rest of their life? I think most of us most of the time, end up at peace, and want to do the right thing. We do not always do it initially. We have to make it part of our character and as it says here we have to work at it. "I work and My Father works." Christ says, and work is an underrated thing in this nation.

Every time I think of work and a Millennial (nothing against the Millennials because I think we are doing our best to raise good hard workers—children—in the church.) but you have seen the videos. I will not even go into them. I guess the warning is you young men especially, and women, in the church,

do not follow the Millennial example. Work, and work hard. And do not play until you have already worked. Do not go for entertainment until you have done the work. Earn it every time by work.

If you will turn with me to Jeremiah 3, please. The glorious earthly Jerusalem of the Millennium will be the earthly representative and forerunner of the heavenly and everlasting Jerusalem that will follow the destruction of the old earth and its atmosphere.

Jeremiah 3:14 "Return, O backsliding children," says the Lord, "for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion."

So this has dual meaning here, does it not? You can see God saying that to the ancient Israelites through Jeremiah as their prophet, and you can also see this being said to us, the church. Think about how Laodicea is described and this fits. God wants backsliding children to turn around.

Jeremiah 3:15-18 "And I will give you shepherds [or ministers] according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land in those days," says the Lord, "that they will say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall it be made anymore. [Verse 17 looks like a millennial scripture.] At that time, Jerusalem shall be called the Throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts. In those days, the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given them as an inheritance to your fathers."

So the citizens of the future Holy Jerusalem constitute the wife of the Lamb. It is a perfect cube denoting a denoting the complete elect church.

During the Millennium, the elect saints reign with Christ over the earth and over Israel and the nations that are in the flesh. Yet we also look for the

heavenly Jerusalem still to come because we are still pilgrims and we have not yet fully arrived. Our eyes are fixed on the heavenly city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.

Turn with me to Revelation 3, please. We catch a glimpse of that city in Revelation where the holy city, the New Jerusalem, descends from heaven. It is not a mere copy of the earthly city that had been destroyed for sins. It is a glorious new city, described in what we would call surrealistic terms. There will be the heavenly Jerusalem, New Jerusalem, that comes down out of heaven from our God.

Revelation 3:12 "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name."

The Greek for "new" as in New Jerusalem, implies that it is new and different from what came before and superseding the old worn out Jerusalem. The first foundation of the spiritual church was laid in the earthly Jerusalem, but it was never a part of the earthly Jerusalem. Referring to Isaiah 28:16, Peter wrote in I Peter 2,

I Peter 2:6 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame."

Now this spiritual church is the earnest of that everlasting Jerusalem which will come down from heaven to abide permanently in the New Heavens and New Earth.

To have a part in the New Jerusalem, we must have endurance, live by faith, and not draw back. While we in this physical life give allegiance to the heavenly Jerusalem, the new city, rather than the old dying city, the earthly Jerusalem.

Hebrews 10:32-39 But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance [What is that, the second or third time he mentions that we need perseverance, enduring perseverance?], so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: "For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

Now notice a few things that relate to the Kingdom of God that are found in the book of Revelation going back there. As the earthly Jerusalem came to symbolize Israel's imperial destiny, the New Jerusalem signifies the full realization of that Kingdom promise. The New Jerusalem is a heavenly city that will far transcend the glory of its earthly counterpart.

In the New Jerusalem, the people of God will enjoy unhindered worship and fellowship under the great Davidic King, Jesus Christ. All things will be made new. We receive a new name and there is a new song that we will be singing. God will create a New Heaven and a New Earth. It will create a New Jerusalem and God the Father, in that spiritual chorus of many spiritual voices proclaims, "Behold, I make all things new."

Revelation 21:1-5 [We see John's vision of this very thing.] Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also, there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride [the church] adorned for her husband [Jesus Christ]. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying,

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."

So the "new" here indicates something of freshness, something unused, something of extremely high quality. The key to understanding the image of newness in the Bible is an awareness that God is the God of new beginnings, who is continuously doing a new thing. For man nothing is new under the sun. He does the same thing, makes the same mistakes, sins the same way over and over again. But with God, everything He does is alive and dynamic, just as His Scriptures are. Every time you read the Bible, the written Word of God, it is vibrant, dynamic, it pops out. You can read the same scripture one day and then read it the next day, and there is something new in it. It is alive because there is spirit to it. We have God's Spirit that provides understanding.

Isaiah 48:6-7 "You have heard; see all this. And will you not declare it? I have made you hear new things from this time, even hidden things, and you did not know them. They are created now and not from the beginning; and before this day you have not heard them, lest you should say, 'Of course I knew them.'"

Showing that things that God reveals to us are also new.

Now this new thing is not simply the displacement of the old, it is something that perfects and completes the old. The book of Hebrews shows the changes of this theme, declaring Christ to be the Mediator of a New Covenant whose atonement confers a new and living way of access to God. What a contrast this is to our present endurance of a great struggle with sufferings, as it says there in Hebrews 10:32, which we read a few minutes ago.

The concept of a holy city as mentioned in Revelation 21:2 is based on prophecies that predict a glorious future for Jerusalem after the judgment. Continuing in verse 9, it allegorically depicts the final state of the church.

Revelation 21:9-14 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come and I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

So this picture is drawn from a twofold perspective. One, the holy Jerusalem is a restoration of paradise. It is also the ideal of true religion realized. And two, the holy Jerusalem is the city that descends out of heaven from God, which characterizes it as, on the one hand, a product of God's supernatural workmanship and as, on the other hand, the culmination of the historic process of redemption. The holy Jerusalem is the full realization of the grand destiny of the people of God, and it represents the time when the reign of God will be fully actualized on earth through the vice regency of the great son of David, Jesus Christ. The New Jerusalem is the place in which we will live in peace and dwell in joyous fellowship with God and His Son through eternity.

Now here in Revelation 21 let us look and see the description of the glory of the New Jerusalem.

Revelation 21:22-27 But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that

defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Revelation 22:1-4 And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.

So John's description ends by glancing at God's servants.

Revelation 2:5 There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

Christians are pilgrims who know that God can keep them from falling to present them before His glorious presence with great joy.

Revelation 22:6-14 Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. "Behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God." And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still." "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and

the Last." Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. [What city? New Jerusalem.]

So Jesus parts with us here in great kindness and assures us it will not be long before He comes to us. "Behold, I am coming quickly" as when He ascended into heaven after His resurrection, He parted with the promise of His gracious presence. So here He parts with the promise of a speedy return. If any say, "Where is the promise of His coming?" when so many ages have passed since this was written, let them know He is not slack to His people but longsuffering to His enemies. That is why it seems like He is taking a long time to come because He is waiting for certain people to still repent, and He is developing His church even more in His character.

His coming will be sooner than the world is aware, sooner than they are prepared, and sooner than they want. But to us, His people, it will be a suitable time. It will be the right time. When God's will is done, the timing is always right. This promise is for an appointed time and will not delay.

He will come quickly and let His promise be always sounding in our ears. Let us give all diligence that we may be found by Him in peace, patiently enduring the great struggle without spiritual blemishes, and blameless regardless of what we face in the future. He is with us every moment of every day.