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The Enchanting City: Theological Perspectives on the City in Post-modern Dress

CLINTON E. STOCKWELL

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JERUSALEM AND BABYLON: THE TWO CITIES OF BIBLICAL HISTORY

Ancient cities were by definition religious and theological. Almost all of them had holy places, ziggurats, temples, or sacred shrines in the central places of the city. Cities such as Babylon or Jerusalem in ancient times were actually rival holy places. Babylon was the city of the towers, the pillars, the holy places that reached to the sky. It was also the city of pagan religion, imperialism, materialism and majestic splendor. For most of the Old and New Testament, Babylon was the city of consummate evil, the sinful city in rebellion against God. In the Book of Revelation, Babylon represented the evil empire of the first century, Rome. Rome, of course was known for its military might, its road system, its architecture, and its civil polity. Initially, the Apostle Paul was proud to be a Roman citizen, as it seemed to invite civic participation from all citizens.

By the time of the Revelation, it seemed rather clear that Rome was not going to be the city to protect all its citizens. Indeed, there were catches to citizenship. These included loyalty to Rome, and worship of the spirit of the empire, the image of the Caesar. In short, Rome became like Old Testament Babylon. It became the "oppressing city", the evil and cruel city, that terrorized the world, and prohibited freedom of expression politically, and freedom of religious practice. Like Babylon, this Rome too would be destroyed, for it was not the city built on the foundations of the city of God. It was not the city of justice, of righteousness, but a city of bribery, idolatry, corruption, murder, and vice.

Jerusalem in purpose was to be a city of peace, a city of justice and righteousness. It was to be a city where all the nations might come to learn the truth and words of Yahweh. It was to be

Yahweh's city, a city whose builder and maker is God. Jerusalem, the ideal city, would be the place where the rulers ruled justly, where peace and righteousness reigned supreme. It would be the city that protected the vulnerable, the poor and the oppressed, the widow and the orphans, the Levite and the stranger. Jerusalem was to be "the light unto the nations", a place where the truth of God would be proclaimed. Of course, like Babylon, the sins of the city would often show themselves, even in Jerusalem. Even here, a place that was to be a city of righteousness, had become a city of corruption, a city given over to idolatries.

In these two "urban biographies", are all the elements of an urban theology

In these two "urban biographies", the tale of the two most prominent biblical cities, are all the elements of an urban theology. What makes for a just city? What kind of city is constructed by God? What is the good city? And on the contrary, what is the evil city, the oppressing city? We are desperate for constructive urban images in a world that has become an urban world. We look for a coming city, a city where the ideals of the kingdom of God are realized, if only in microcosm, if only in smaller communities that point the way to greater visions of what cities can be.

INTERPRETING THE BIBLICAL CITY

Under Judgement: The Theology of the City According to Jacques Ellul
Three major perspectives on the cities of

the bible have been in currency in the past twenty five years. Jacques Ellul, in his book, *The Meaning of the City*, has written the most popular book on the city in theological perspective. His view is that the city is consummate evil, because cities are by definition man-made. The attempts to scale the heavens with the towers, ashcrabs, pillars, ziggurats, reflect human attempts to scale the heavens. Following Karl Barth, Ellul believes that religion is always flawed, as it represents the human attempt to climb to God, reflecting an ideology of works, rather than faith. For Barth, and for Ellul, religion is the opposite of revelation. In revelation, it is God who discloses God's self to man, and this God does in grace, not in response to human achievement. Hence, God's act in Christ is the contradiction to human religion. It is the repudiation of all human attempts to image God, a repudiation of idolatry and its accompanying immoralities.

For Barth, and for Ellul, religion is the opposite of revelation

For Ellul, the city stands in alienation, in rebellion against God and God's self-disclosure in the Law, the prophets, and ultimately in Jesus of Nazareth. Human religion is thus in opposition against God, and is understood as hostile, at enmity, or at war against God's purpose for the world. Ellul points out that in Genesis, cities like Babylon, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities of the empires such as Nineveh or Tyre and Sidon, stand under the judgement of God. Rather than places of "true religion", or places where the demands of God are manifest among a people, cities to Ellul seem to only represent corruption, cruelty, evil, and injustice.

For Ellul, the city stands in rebellion against God

For Ellul, cities are symbols of power and conquest. Cities also have religious significance for Ellul, as in the city, "man conquers time, space, power" (p.14). For Ellul, the city is a break with creation, and is at enmity with the church. City-building was a sign of opposition to God. "The city is cursed. She is condemned to death because of everything she represents."¹ For Ellul, Babylon as a city sums up human civilization in hostility to God. Like all cities, Babylon is under judgement, and her fate is waste and desolation.² "All the merchants of the earth were made wealthy by the greatness of her wealth." Hence, when the city is destroyed, so also are the merchants who weep, and share in the destiny of the city. For Ellul, the city is the symbol of wealth and pride, and pride always results in a fall as a consequence of the divine judgement.

Ellul overdoes it

However, Ellul overdoes it. "All the inhabitants of the city are destined sooner or later to become prostitutes and members of the proletariat."³ Ellul believes that wars are always between cities.⁴ Cities frequently become the targets, perhaps even the victims of warfare. Remember the burning of Dresden, or the bombing of Hiroshima. However, wars in human history have frequently been between tribes, between clans, and between peoples over the land, not just over the city.

Ellul believes also that unemployment is a city problem. Unemployment is "essentially an urban problem, found only in the country only because of the contagious and gangrenous growth of the city."⁵ However, at least in the North American experience the phenomenon of unemployment is due to economic realities, which influence city life, but can not be simplistically reduced to the city. The black migration to the cities was due to the closing down of the plantations, and the rise of scientific technology. Similarly today, the loss of the "family farm" is due to the rise of corporate farming. If anything, it is the rise of science, and changing economic realities such as the rise of corporations, and the

globalization of the economy that causes unemployment. Capitalism, it may be argued, requires a surplus labour force. Cities are victims of an economic system, but not the causes of unemployment. The unemployed rush to the cities to find work, when it can not be found anymore in the rural south, or in the rural parts of southern Europe.

Even for Ellul, the cities seem to be a product of necessity:

"It is right and proper, is it not, when one is chief of state, to build fortresses? It is right and proper to cover the principal access routes into the country and to keep watch over them. It is right and proper to establish commercial centres at the main crossroads and to put storehouses there, just as it is proper to have an army and equipment for war."⁶

For Ellul, the existence of cities seems reasonable, even necessary, but not enough to escape the judgement of God. Ellul admits that cities are the product of "good will", the efforts of the "well-intentioned".⁷ Cities have purposes, to enable people to live better, to have access to homes, leisure activities, for community, for work and employment, for protection, and "to ensure him more comfort and what are called the joys of life, with all the guarantees of science, medicine, and pharmacology at his doorstep."⁸ But this is not enough, for it is the city built without proper foundation. It is the city built for itself, without reference to God as judge or saviour.

THE FUNCTIONAL VIEW OF THE CITY

Ellul's theology of the city is not the only view of the city. He reveals much that is significant about the city, but his view is skewed and partial. Pervasive also throughout the Old Testament can be found the functional city, or the city as gifts of God's grace. Cities are not always corrupt, and often have much more positive imagery. Frank Frick, for example, in his, *The City in Ancient Israel*,⁹ argues that the city is basically morally neutral, but it depends on what people do in the city as to whether the city is a good or oppressing city. In this perspective, the city does not have necessarily a positive or negative value, but it depends on the practice of community in the place that determines the character and reputation of the city.

Cities often have much more positive imagery

There are, for example, several different kinds of cities in the Old Testament. There were forty-eight Levitical cities, for example. These were cities that were designated as homes or bases of operations for the Levites. Further, it was the job of the Levites to visit neighbouring cities to publish and proclaim Yahweh's Law. It was their job to instruct the children of Israel in all the decrees, ordinances, rituals, commands, and duties of the Torah, the oral and written revelation of Yahweh to the covenant people. Among the covenant duties were to remain as a "peculiar people", known by their fidelity to the law of God, and their practice of the law as revealed.

There were other cities of importance in biblical times. There were also six "cities of refuge". These were cities on either side of the Jordan River where a manslayer could flee for protection against the avenger. It was a place where a person could receive the judgement of the priest, and if not guilty, could stay in the city for reasons of safety, until the high priest of the city died. There were also cities of military importance. King Solomon, for example, built chariot cities to protect his empire. These were in cities like Gezer, Hazor, or Megiddo. They were walled, and staffed with a garrison, horses, and chariots. They were situated on the edges of the empire to protect it from invasion from enemy countries.

STORE CITIES

There were also grain or storage cities. These were cities where food and grain were stored to avert famine and to enable the country to survive economic depressions. The great example is with the patriarch Joseph, who instructed all of Egypt to bring a portion of their crops to storage cities. When the depression became even more severe, Joseph relocated the people, including his own people, near one of the cities, so that they could survive the famine. Storage cities made good sense economically, and were also of major religious significance. It was a sign of faithfulness and obedience to

1. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1970), p.45.

2. *Ibid.*, 51.

3. *Ibid.*, 55.

4. *Ibid.*, 51, 62.

5. *Ibid.*, 61.

6. *Ibid.*, 41.

7. *Ibid.*, 60.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Frank S. Frick, *The City in Ancient Israel* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977).

bring a tenth of one's crops, and of one's livestock to the storehouses of the city.

However, store cities could be corrupt. It was the enslavement of Israel in Egypt and their task of building store cities in Pithom and Rameses that provided the context for the Exodus. Also, under Solomon, store cities were built, with the assistance of slave labour.

"... And Solomon built Gezer, Lower Beth-Horon, Baalath and Tamar in the wilderness of the land, and all his own store-cities, and the cities for his chariots, and the cities for his horsemen' (I Kings 9:15ff). But it is here that Solomon's first unfaithfulness may be noticed. He founds the cities in slavery. And, forgetful of what happened in Egypt, forgetful of the Mosaic legislation for slaves, he enslaved 'the foreigner who is within... (his) gates' for his purposes of power: 'these Solomon made a forced levy of slaves'.¹⁰

In Deuteronomy, tithing principles are described, and the proceeds are to benefit the Levites, as well as the dependent poor in the city. Also, there is the note of protection of the stranger, because Israel was once a slave in Egypt.

"You shall not forsake the Levite who is within your gates, for he has no part in the inheritance with you. At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithes of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do".¹¹

The next chapter, Deuteronomy 15, describes the responsibility of Israel for the poor in the land. There might be poor and dependent in Israel, but they would have no needs. The tithing principle is reiterated in Malachi. The command to "bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that they may be food in my house" (Mal. 3:15) continues the theme of laying aside provisions for the vulnerable of society. Just as there were storehouse cities, so the Temple also became a place where food and grain were stored, so as to provide food for the hungry in their time of need.

There were other cities beyond these. Certainly Bethel and Jerusalem among others provided an important religious function. It is there where shrines to Yahweh were built, and there where

religious rituals occurred. Ultimately, at Jerusalem a Temple was built by David and Solomon, noting that the capital of the kingdom, indeed the kingdom itself had religious significance. Indeed, most towns in ancient Israel were built on "tells", small mountains, for reasons of defense, as well as places of religious significance. If not temples and shrines, places of sacrifice and prayers were found in the centre of the towns. Cities in the Old Testament were significant in other ways. Cities like Tyre, Sidon, and Joppa were port cities of significance. Cities like Gaza, Beersheba, or Damascus were important caravan cities, cities of commerce. The city of Ezion Geber was the only real industrial city, and was the place where Solomon built his ships, and may have also been a place of copper smelting as well.

Cities have symbolic significance

Similarly, cities today are important in how they function. Cities have symbolic significance as places of government, trade and commerce, leisure, religion, industry, or shipping. Washington D.C. for example is a capital city, noted for its function for government and politics. Chicago historically, was known as the city of the broad shoulders, the industrial-manufacturing city. Now it is becoming the city of finance, the headquarters of corporate giants like Amoco, Sears, Wards, and several of the Fortune 500 companies in the suburbs to the West and North. Jerusalem and Mecca certainly function as religious centers, just as Rome combines religious with governmental significance. Some cities like New Orleans or Alexandria, Egypt, are known for shipping and ship building. Others, such as Las Vegas or Miami are known for leisure, gambling or resorts for the wealthy. Cities differ also by reputation. Just as Montreal, Seattle, or Minneapolis are reputed to be good cities, so cities like Houston, Atlanta, Los Angeles or noted for crime and murder. Cities like Chicago are noted for racial antagonism, and strife between labour and capital, whereas Tokyo is now the city with the highest, and most costly, standard of living on earth.

Just as Frick has noted the importance of city function in the Old Testament, so Wayne Meeks has noted the importance of city function in New Testament times.¹² For Meeks, Paul was very much a city person, and the cities of the Roman world

form the context for Paul's ministry. Paul established churches in each of the cities of the Roman world. This was of strategic significance, and early Christianity, following the contours of Greco-Roman civilization to the cities, became very much an urban movement.

Paul established churches in each of the cities of the Roman world

Paul and the apostles went to the cities, not because cities represented something either good or evil, but because of their strategic importance. Paul believed in the possibility that the *pax Christi* could triumph over the *pax Romana*. The assumption carried by Paul seemed to be that if you captured the city, you captured the province around it. In the Greek city state system, built upon by the Romans, the city controlled the state, and in Rome the province, around it. Hence, in the first century urban world, Paul planted churches in the cities, as a strategy for the evangelization of the world.

The miracle of early Christianity is that among the many choices available, it managed to become the choice of Constantine, and the "Holy Roman Empire". There were many other options, including Greek philosophical schools, mystery religions, the civil religion of the Roman Caesar, Judaism, and by the sixth century, Islam. Yet, Christianity, despite persecution, became the religion of the Roman Empire by the fourth century CE. Why did this happen? In the early part of this century, the church historian, Shirley Jackson Case of the University of Chicago, argued that there was a functional relationship between the triumph of early Christianity and the empire. Despite the numerous persecutions under Caesars Nero, Domitian, Decius, and Diocletian, Christianity survived.

CHRISTIANITY'S TRIUMPH IN ROME

For Case, there were three major reasons why Christianity triumphed in the Roman world, and the other options did not.

"Gentile Christianity gained its foothold first in the cities and among the lower strata of society. Slaves were

10. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 31.

11. Deut. 14:27-29.

12. Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press,

1983).

conspicuous among its early adherents, yet their contribution to its economic success was in the nature of the case rather limited.... But converts from among manual laborers, skilled artisans, and small traders, of the freedman class, etc, were also numerous at an early date; and their earning ability was measurably increased and stabilized as a result of membership in the new association."¹³

Case here points out three reasons for the triumph of the early church. First, early Christianity was rooted in the cities. By the fourth century, each of the major cities had bishops, and the three competing "schools of theology" were in cities, notably Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome. Constantine's conversion was as much politically motivated as religious, for the church had captured much of the city among the artisan classes by the early fourth century, making conversion to Christianity politically expedient.

Early Christianity triumphed, because of its strategic location in the cities

Second, the church practiced radical inclusion. They included anyone and everyone, Gentiles, slaves, prostitutes, sinners, the outcasts of society, including children abandoned in Greco-Roman cities. Third, they showed compassion for the poor. Their reputation is that the church adopted the throw away children of society. They took care, not only of the poor of the churches, but the poor of the empire, noted Emperor Justinian. Thus, early Christianity triumphed, because of its strategic location in the cities. It spread there, among the poor, the slaves, and ultimately among people of social standing. The result was a social force that has been dominant for two millennia.

Early Christianity achieved a universal appeal that rival religions envied

Because of the inclusiveness of the gospel, early Christianity achieved a universal appeal that rival religions

envied. Rites of initiation were open to anyone, not closed to a chosen few. Christianity was not a religion of a race, or for a particular class of people, such as the appeal of Mithraism to Roman soldiers. Christianity had a universal appeal, to both Jews and Greeks, slaves and freedmen. Because of this inclusivism, one could be rich or poor, male or female, Jew or Gentile, or even a person of colour. It mattered little for the gospel was perceived as breaking down barriers between the classes, races, and the nations, resulting in the creation of a new people, the people of God. Christianity succeeded in the Roman world, because it captured the cities, and because of its inclusive gospel and its practice of community and compassion for those who had need.

THE DIVINE CITY: CITIES AS GIFTS OF GOD

Cities were often viewed with utmost significance, even as gifts of God. In Genesis 4:17, the city was as much a safe place for nomads in the time of trouble, as they were symbols of human power and dominance and the exclusion of the divine. Cities had positive functions in the Old Testament. They were places of community and socialization. They were places of protection and defense against one's enemies. They were also places for food, water and sustenance in a time of need. Finally, cities had religious significance, as the place of a temple, or religious shrine, or symbol of justice and righteousness, as a model of a just community to the nations. While Jerusalem, in particular, did not always live up to this purpose, it maintained this function and purpose for most of biblical history.

Cities were gifts of Yahweh to the Covenant people as they came into the land of Canaan. In the book of Deuteronomy, the following is found.

"And when the Lord your God brings you into the land which he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you, with great and goodly cities, which you did not build, and houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, and cisterns hewn out, which you did not hew, and vineyards and olive trees, which you did not plant, and when you eat and are full, then take heed lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."¹⁴

Clearly from this passage, the cities of Canaan are portrayed as gifts of Yahweh. Also, it is clear that the cities, and even the goods found in cities necessary for life, such as water cisterns and food, are regarded as "good things". The cities are called "great and goodly cities", not bad or evil in themselves, but places of value and significance. Finally, just like all gifts and graces of Yahweh, these are goods that Israel did not build, but must receive them as a gift. Symbolic of God's work of grace in selecting Israel, cities are given to a people, undeserving and unmerited. Israel did not build or even merit these good cities, they are rather given to her as gifts of God.

Cities in the Book of Deuteronomy were therefore symbols of God's grace. Israel was chosen of God to be the people of God, not because she was a mighty or even a righteous people, but rather because God chose Israel in fulfillment of the promises made to early patriarchs. In the same way, Israel was delivered from captivity, given the Law, provided food to eat in the wilderness, given the Shekinah glory, the visible presence of God to be with them on the trip, and given prophets and leaders such as Moses to guide the way. Similarly, Israel, because of the promise to Abraham, was given a promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey. In this land was all the provisions of life, including water and food. In this land was also to be found fertile lands for crops, and cities to live in. These were all gifts of God, unmerited favours to the covenant people. Even the city of Jerusalem, prominent in biblical history, was not built by Israel, but was given to Israel, and in essence adopted as the divine city in the process.

The prophets may have been rural, and may have had prejudices against wayward kings, false prophets, and priests schooled to tell those in power what they wanted to hear. However, the "true prophets" were not anti-city, they were against the evils of the city as practiced by wicked and self-serving individuals. They were against systems of injustice, as evidenced by corruption and bribery. They were against the lack of compassion and lack of justice rendered towards the poor, particularly the widows and the orphans. "They did not condemn the city, but self-sufficiency, misuse of power and domineering economic systems as rebellions against Yahweh. The sin was not the city itself, nor its walls, nor its towers, but the trust urbanites frequently placed in these fortifications."¹⁵

Israel's mistake was that she trusted often in her kings, walls, armies, priests,

13. Shirley Jackson Case, *The Social Triumph of the Ancient Church* (New York: Allen and Unwin, 1934), 69. See also, Shirley Jackson Case, *The Social Origins of Christianity*

(Chicago: University of Chicago, 1923).

14. Deut. 6:10-12.

15. Don C. Benjamin, *Deuteronomy and City Life: A Form*

Criticism of Texts with the word CITY ('ir) in Deuteronomy 4:41-26:19 (New York: University Press of America, 1983).

prophets, and diplomatic relationships. These were considered by God to be a betrayal of trust, and a misguided attempt to fashion security in a world without God. These efforts were made more abominable because they were accompanied by trust in other deities, and a tacit acceptance of other cultural practices. Instead of trust in Yahweh, Israel rebelled by trusting in her military, or in her diplomacy. The result as well was idolatry and immorality. Other deities took the place of Yahweh, threatening the gifts Yahweh had given them, particularly their status as a chosen people, and the gifts of the promised land and the goods in the land, including the cities.

Cities could be of benefit, if Yahweh was worshipped, and if the Law was taught

Cities could be of benefit, if Yahweh was worshipped, and if the Law was taught and practiced. The Psalmist mused, "unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city the watchman stays awake in vain."¹⁶ Other Psalms describe the city as a fit place for the people of God to dwell, and a fit symbol for Yahweh in person. Yahweh is identified with the foundations, the bulwarks, the citadel. "A mighty fortress is our God." If Israel acknowledged God and the Law, then God could be identified with her cities and her fortresses. In Psalm 48, this identification is captured: "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, in his Holy Mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion on the sides of the North, in the city of the great King.... As we have heard, So we have seen, In the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God. God will establish it forever..."¹⁷

The city is therefore the place where God dwells, the place of sacrifice and praise. It is the place of protection, a refuge from invasion and marauding tribes. It is the place of the temple, of the sanctuaries, of the courts of law and justice. The cities are the place where, in the gates, judgement is delivered, and the law is instructed so that the people can walk in observance of the Torah, practicing what is just and right.

16. Psalm 127:1.

17. Psalm 48:1-2, 8.

18. Donald E. Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 9.

In the Old Testament, a "Zion theology" emerges with the King, David. Zion is the name of the fortress city, the city of Jerusalem. David is given Jerusalem, and makes it the capital of his kingdom. Jerusalem becomes, not just the capital of David's empire, but also the place where Yahweh dwells, the place of the temple, and the centre of religious ritual and the publication of the Law of Yahweh. Initially, Zion as Yahweh's fortress was attached literally to the city of Jerusalem. However, with the destruction of Jerusalem at hand, the prophets of the exile spoke of a heavenly Jerusalem, or a New Jerusalem, an eschatological Jerusalem that would come at the end of history. After the exile to Babylon in 586 BC, Zion as the symbol of God's presence was thus transferred from literal Jerusalem, to the spiritual or final Jerusalem at the end of history.

"The Zion theme is thus a remarkable example of the persistence of ideas, even when they have been shown beyond any doubt to be completely wrong in one manifestation. Despite the embarrassment of the fall of Jerusalem, and with it the end of all that Judeans trusted in; despite their eventual acceptance of the tragedy as fully merited judgement for their own sins, they could not, it seems, abandon that symbol of the city of God built on his holy mountain in favor of something better.... That continuing potency of the concept of the *city of God* as an eschatological symbol, throughout history to our own day, is another reason for emphasizing Zion as the center of Israel's hopes."¹⁸

From the time of the prophets, Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah and onward, Israel looked for a restored and redeemed Jerusalem, as the centre of prophetic tradition, and the hope for the future. In the Old Testament, Jerusalem was always seen as an improved earthly city, but never as supernatural and heavenly.¹⁹ Both Jesus and Paul recognized the importance of Jerusalem as the city of God, and both recognized the city's shortcomings, and potential. Jesus would weep over Jerusalem because it was the place that stoned the prophets. Paul himself would concede the authority of the Jerusalem apostles, but not their theology with respect to the Gentiles. For Jerusalem was to be a "light unto the nations", not a symbol for an exclusive Judaized Christianity.

In both testaments, Jerusalem as the city of God had a utopian and

19. H. Schmidt, "Jerusalem", in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology II* (1976), 326.

20. Matthew 23:39.

21. Hebrews 11:10; 12:22.

eschatological dimension. It was the place where the ideal Messiah would reign, and the place that would also be the hope for the nations. Despite the city's rejection of Jesus, the Messiah would still return to Jerusalem to set things right.²⁰ In Galatians, Paul distinguishes Jerusalem "from below", and Jerusalem "from above". The city from below was the captive city, under the law. The city "from above" was the free city, redeemed and restored as the city of salvation, for Jews and Gentiles, freedman and slaves. The old Jerusalem represented slavery and bondage, whereas the New Jerusalem represented salvation and peace.

In the letter to the Hebrews, believers are told that the patriarchs and the prophets looked for a city "whose builder and maker is God."²¹ Of course, Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees, the most prominent city of the time, to look for another city. He did not find one in Canaan, although Abraham "waited for a city that has foundations". The disciples are said to have approached "Mount Zion, and to the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem."²² The theme of the heavenly Jerusalem is reiterated in the book of Revelation. In Revelation, the hopes for a new city are realized, as the New Jerusalem descends to earth from above. The heavenly city becomes once again the earthly city. The Revelation depicts the final image of the reign of God, and it is the image of a city. In the new city, there would be no more sorrow, death, pain, or weeping, "for the former things are passed away".²³

The final image of the reign of God is the image of a city

Rather, in the ideal city, the New Jerusalem, there would be peace, joy, beauty, and shared wealth. In the foursquare city, the hopes of humankind are finally fulfilled. Justice and mercy finally reign, for God is present in the new city, for the rule of God finally comes to earth. All the hope of a coming ideal city are finally realized, and God reigns on earth in the city of God. The ideal city was prominent in medieval thought, and could be found in the ideas of the Reformers, and in the beliefs of the churches, Catholic and Reformed. However, with the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the image of the city progressively freed itself from established religions, papal or protestant. The secular city was the result. ●

22. Hebrews 12:22.

23. Revelation 21:4.