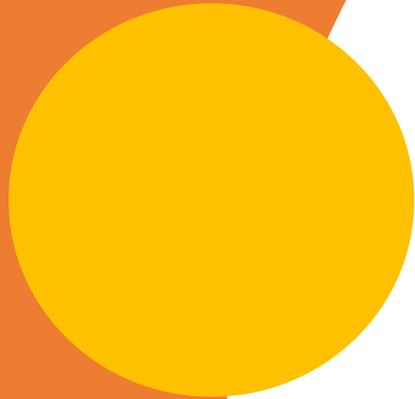


Scripture Summer School

Jessie 4

Progress





“Are we there yet?”

Prophetic ideas of Progress



From Garden to City

- Can only speak of ultimate beginning and ending in symbols
- In the beginning:
 - Garden of Eden
 - Beginnings, potential, possibility
 - Fallibility and brokenness
- At the end: New Jerusalem
 - No more sin and suffering
- In between?
 - Creation – Fall – Redemption?
 - Salvation History implies more than restoring to original goodness
 - There is also growth and development ('cultural mandate' of Genesis 1:28)
 - Not a return to the garden!



The City in the Bible

- Negative portrayal: Places of alienation, exploitation and oppression
 - Cain (who murdered his brother) is the first city builder (Gen 4:17)
 - Yet Cain's line also has the ancestors of cultural and technological progress (4:20-22)
 - The Tower of Babel (=Babylon) presents collective pride which God opposes (Gen 11:1-9)
- Positive portrayal: Jerusalem, David's city and city of God
 - Psalm 46, 87, 122, 125 etc
- 'The City' is not to be destroyed, but redeemed.



Jerusalem, city of God

Psalm 46: 4-5

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.

Isaiah 1:21-23

How the faithful city
has become a whore!
She that was full of justice,
righteousness lodged in her—
but now murderers!
²² Your silver has become dross,
your wine is mixed with water.
²³ Your princes are rebels
and companions of thieves.
Everyone loves a bribe
and runs after gifts.
They do not defend the orphan,
and the widow's cause does not
come before them.



Promise of Return from Exile

- Jerusalem will be rebuilt and God will dwell in her again

Isaiah 54:11-14

O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted,
I am about to set your stones in antimony,
and lay your foundations with sapphires.

¹² I will make your pinnacles of rubies,
your gates of jewels,
and all your wall of precious stones.

¹³ All your children shall be taught by the LORD,
and great shall be the prosperity of your children.

¹⁴ In righteousness you shall be established;
you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear;
and from terror, for it shall not come near you.



The Return from Exile

Biblical Texts

- Ezra chapter 1-7 gives the story
- Psalm 126 gives a sense of the experience

Prophetic books: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Persians allowed the people to return

- Exiles return in a number of different groups
 - First group in 539 BCE
- Many never return – there continued to be a Jewish community in Babylonia
- Persian State sponsored the building of a Temple

The difficulties faced:

- Adjusting to a new way of life (agricultural)
- Opposition from local population
- Hopes unfulfilled – no Davidic king



Zechariah 8

³ Thus says the LORD: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts shall be called the holy mountain. ⁴ Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. ⁵ And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. ⁶ Thus says the LORD of hosts: Even though it seems impossible to the remnant of this people in these days, should it also seem impossible to me, says the LORD of hosts? ⁷ Thus says the LORD of hosts: I will save my people from the east country and from the west country; ⁸ and I will bring them to live in Jerusalem. They shall be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.

⁹ Thus says the LORD of hosts: Let your hands be strong—you that have recently been hearing these words from the mouths of the prophets who were present when the foundation was laid for the rebuilding of the temple, the house of the LORD of hosts. ¹⁰ For before those days there were no wages for people or for animals, nor was there any safety from the foe for those who went out or came in, and I set them all against one another. ¹¹ But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, says the LORD of hosts. ¹² For there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, and the skies shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. ¹³ Just as you have been a cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you and you shall be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong. ...

²⁰ Thus says the LORD of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, the inhabitants of many cities; ²¹ the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, “Come, let us go to entreat the favor of the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts; I myself am going.” ²² Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favor of the LORD. ²³ Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”



God's future – in history or beyond it?

- Prophetic literature – tends to look for the action of God within history and as part of historic processes
- Apocalyptic – God will intervene directly to end the present evil age and bring about the glorious new age.
- *Note: an oversimplification! A spectrum*



What kind of Messiah?

In the arrest scene in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus names and rejects two common views about the Messiah:

- A Messiah who will fight to destroy the enemies and usher in an epoch of never-ending peace. (God acting through human actions within history)
- A Messiah for whom God intervenes violently to destroy God's enemies and set up the Kingdom. (God breaks into history to override human action)
- The third way – crucifixion and resurrection

Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?"

(Matthew 26:50-54)



The New Jerusalem: Revelation 21

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” ...

¹⁰ And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites; ¹³ on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. ¹⁴ And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

¹⁵ The angel who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. ¹⁶ The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width; and he measured the city with his rod, ...

1. Draws particularly on Ezekiel’s vision of restored Jerusalem and rebuilt Temple in Ezekiel 40-48:
 - *He brought me, in visions of God, to the land of Israel, and set me down upon a very high mountain, on which was a structure like a city to the south. When he brought me there, a man was there, whose appearance shone like bronze, with a linen cord and a measuring reed in his hand; and he was standing in the gateway. (Ez 40: 2-3)*
 - The high mountain
 - The angelic figure to measure the dimensions
 - Difference: This city is built in the Land. In Revelation it “comes down out of heaven from God”
 - Ezekiel 48:30-34 The gates of Jerusalem, 3 per side, 12 in total. With the names of the 12 Tribes of Israel. “And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The LORD is There.”
2. Note the plural: “They will be his peoples ...”.



The rebuilt Temple?

22 I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. 25 Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. 26 People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. 27 But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

(Rev 22:22-27)

- In Ezekiel's vision the Glory of God that had gone into Exile returns to fill the rebuilt Temple – Ezekiel 43:1-9.
- In John's vision, the Glory of the Lord needs no Temple
- The glory of the nations is brought into the New Jerusalem
 - Colonialism ✘
 - A taking up of all human achievement and development into God's own project. ✔



The Garden is taken up into the City



The Garden of Eden (Genesis 2-3)

A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches ... (Gen 2:10f)

The tree of life in the middle of the Garden



Ezekiel 47:1-12

Then he brought me back to the entrance of the temple; there, water was flowing from below the threshold of the temple ... (becomes a river) .. I saw on the bank of the river a great many trees on the one side and on the other. He said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh. Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live ...

On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing."



Revelation 22:1-5

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.



Getting from here to there ...

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.” (Revelation 11:15)

- What is God’s activity?
- What is human activity?
- “Are we there yet?”



To think about ...

How does God's kingdom
come on earth?

Do I tend more toward
the apocalyptic or the
prophetic in my thinking?
Might there be a 'third
way'?

