

WHY CITIES?



INTRODUCTION

All over the world today leaders, both secular and Christian, are becoming increasingly aware of the role cities play in influencing our world. As someone has said, 'As the cities go, so go the nations of the world'.

Cities are the main transmitters of culture, values, and belief. Culture is formed in cities. They are the centers for education, literature, the arts, music, film, television, other media, and so much more. Whatever develops in the city tends to have a profound effect throughout the nation and often the world.¹

For this reason it is essential that the church has a proper understanding of cities and a 'city-focus'. From Genesis to Revelation the Bible has much to say about cities. Only as we understand our cities from a divine standpoint, central in the overall plan of God, living entities contended for by principalities and powers, will we be able to reach them effectively. The following contains a fair amount of material taken from acknowledged sources, especially *City of God*, *City of Satan* by Robert Linthicum, *To Transform a City* by Tim Keller plus 'A House for His

¹ Q-Ideas for the Common Good

Glory' by the author of this document. It is written with the hope that it might even spur others better qualified to write more comprehensively on this subject.

The Bible is to a large extent a city book. Cities were largely the world of Moses, David, Daniel, Jesus, and Paul. Cities were central to God's plan both for Israel and the early Church. All of history has revolved around cities. So today, cities play a pivotal role in the destiny of nations individually and as a whole. Examples of this abound in recent history. Some of the bigger cities; London, Rome, Berlin, New York, and so on, have all been major influencers in world history. Church history has also revolved around cities - Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, and Geneva, to mention a few. The mention of each city, triggers, brings to mind, certain impressions, pictures that are sometimes positive, sometimes negative. Each city has a personality of its own, releasing its own particular river of good or bad into the mainstream of national and world affairs. To a lesser extent this is true of all cities and towns.

We need to keep in mind that most Biblical writers were motivated by God's intentions for all of city life, the spiritual plus the economical, political and social aspects.

WHAT IS A CITY?

'The main Hebrew word translated 'city' refers to a human settlement surrounded by a fortification or wall. Most ancient cities numbered only about 1000-3000 in population. 'City,' therefore, meant not so much population size as density. Psalm 122:3 refers to this density.

'Jerusalem, built as a city should be, closely compact'. The word translated 'compact' meant to be closely intertwined and joined. In a fortified city, the people lived close to one another in tightly compacted houses and streets. In fact, most ancient cities were estimated to be

five to ten acres, with 240 residents per acre. By comparison contemporary Manhattan houses only 105 residents per acre. Auckland has 9.5 persons per acre.

In ancient times then a city was what today would be called a 'mixed use' walkable human settlement. Because of the population's density, there were places to live and work, to buy and sell, to pursue and enjoy art, to worship and seek justice – all within an easy walk. In ancient times rural areas and villages could not provide all these elements and in our modern times the 'suburb' deliberately avoids this pattern. Suburbs are defined by single use zones – so places to live, work, play and learn are separated from one another and are reachable only by car, usually through pedestrian-hostile zones.

What makes a city a city is proximity. It brings people – and therefore residences, work places and cultural institutions – together. It creates street life and marketplaces, bringing about more person to person interactions in a day than are possible anywhere else. This is what the biblical writers meant when they talked about a 'city.'²

CITIES ARE CENTRAL TO GOD'S PLAN

Nearly a century ago author *Henry Drummond* wrote these words:

'To make cities that is what we are here for. To make good cities – that is for the present hour the main work of Christianity. For the city is strategic, it makes the town, the towns makes the villages, the villages makes the country. He who makes the city makes the world. When Christianity should take upon itself the full responsibility, the burden and care of cities, the Kingdom of God will openly come on earth. People do not dispute that religion is in the church. What is now wanted is to let them see it in

² From *To Transform a City* by Tim Keller

the city. One Christian city, one city in any part of the earth whose citizens from the greatest to the humblest live in the spirit of Christ, where religion has overflowed the churches and passed into the streets inundating every house and workshop and permeating the whole social and commercial life, one such Christian city would seal the redemption of the world.’³

Professor Blaiklock NZ wrote, ‘Paul saw clearly enough that if the Empire, of which he was, rarely for a Jew, an accredited citizen, was to be won for Christ, it must be a process initiated and forwarded by the great urban congregations. The vision is not dated. Christianise the great cities, and one is more than halfway towards the evangelism of the whole world. Lose the cities, and some today, from Calcutta to New York and London, seem poised upon some evasive brink, lose them to violence, degradation and corruption, and the country is also lost. Gain them, cleanse their hearts, make them fit to live in, and much on a vast front is won. The cities are a missionary field of the first order today, their withering hearts and their exploding suburbs. They must be invaded, their dead hearts evangelised in the week, if not the week-ends. They matter much.’⁴

Jack Hayford, author, pastor and speaker, ‘Through contact with other leaders, I am finding there are more and more believers across the United States and around the world who are experiencing the same compassion and intercessory burden for their cities and towns. If you are among those, then it is my prayer that you may feel even *more* confirmed in the call to love and pray for your city and your church; to believe that God will bring a new tomorrow to them. As Joshua reveals in the case of Jericho and other cities, our Living Lord is ‘into’ city-taking.

³ The City Without a Church. Henry Drummond Collection. Old Landmark Publishing 2006

⁴ The World of the New Testament Ark Publishing London 1979

I believe He has called us all to expect we can ‘possess’ our cities – for the blessing of every citizen and for the glory of God.’⁵

CITIES IN THE BIBLE

There are major themes, truths, running through the Bible. One of these is ‘*cities*’ which runs parallel with a sister theme, that of ‘*nations*’. In Scripture cities have a prominent place. From *Genesis to Revelation* city/cities are mentioned 1200 plus times and nations approximately 600 times. Cities were inherited, built, fought over, governed, preached to, rebuked, judged, destroyed, healed. From *Cain* onwards it seems men were preoccupied with building cities. While cities of our day are different in many ways to cities of early history, even up to the industrial revolution, we can learn from them. Genesis sheds some light on ancient *cities*. First we see that following his expulsion from the garden of Eden, Cain desired a *city*. Genesis 4:16,17, “then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord ... and he built a *city*.” This was a common pursuit of men pre-flood, ie. to build cities. Ancient cities were usually built around ziggurats—the original skyscrapers. These were temples where a particular god was thought to come down. Cities were the royal residences of the gods, and a city was often dedicated to its god.

CITIES: POST FLOOD

Then, following the flood, Gen 11:1-9, men said, “*Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves ...*” This man centred initiative aroused the Lord’s concern “..and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be impossible to them, come let Us go down and there confuse their language”. The synergy contemplated in their city would have had disastrous

⁵ Source Unknown

consequences. So much so that it brought swift divine intervention.

Following this, we read that Abraham inquired of God concerning Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis 18 & 19

We may draw from this passage certain conclusions.

1. *Cities* are accountable to God.
2. Sin defiles *cities*.
3. God judges *cities*.
4. Righteousness can help bring deliverance to *cities*.
5. God hears those who intercede for *cities*.
6. God looks for people to stand in the gap for our

cities.

Hebrews 11 tells us that *Abraham* also looked for a city.

JACOB AND A CITY

Genesis 28. After fleeing from Esau *Jacob* (the deceiver!) comes to the *city* of Luz. Here Jacob encounters the Lord in a dream as he sleeps with his head on a stone. He sees a ladder, its top reaching to heaven, angels are ascending and descending and the Lord is at the top of the ladder. The Lord promises the land to Jacob and his descendants. Jacob exclaims 'How awesome is this place, this is none other than the House of God'. He then changes the name of the *city* from Luz to Bethel which means The House of God.¹ Here we are introduced to the thought that God seeks a house, a dwelling place in our cities.

DEUTERONOMY AND CITIES

Recounting Israel's journey in the wilderness Moses reminded the people.

Deuteronomy 2:36. 'Not one city was too strong for us – the Lord delivered all to us.'

Deuteronomy 3:4. 'There was not a city we did not take from them.'

Deuteronomy 9:1, 'Hear O Israel: You are to pass over Jordan this day, to go in to possess nations greater and

mightier than yourself, cities great and fenced up to heaven’.

Central to God’s plan for Israel was the possession of cities.

JOSHUA AND CITIES.

Josh. 18:9 The land was described by cities -

The peoples inheritance was by cities. Josh. 13:28 and 19:16,23,31.

Cities fell like dominoes as nations were conquered.

DAVID, THE PSALMIST AND CITIES

David brought the Ark of God’s presence into a city. 2

Samuel 6:12 ‘David went and brought the ark of God ... to the City of David with gladness.’

Psalms 132 reveals David’s passion to find a dwelling place for the mighty God of Jacob in a city. (See Ps. 132:5).

Psalms 60:9 ‘Who will bring me into the strong city?’

Psalms 72:16b ‘Those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth’.

Psalms 107:4 ‘He (God) led them to a city for a habitation.’

Psalms 122:3 A city of peace

PROVERBS AND CITIES

Proverbs 8: 1-3 ‘Does not wisdom cry out ...she cries out by the gates, at the entry of the city’. Proverbs 9:3b ‘she (wisdom) cries out in the highest places of the city’.

Proverbs 11:10,11. ‘When it goes well with the righteous the city rejoices; and when the wicked perish, there is jubilation. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.’

Proverbs 21:22 ‘A wise man scales the city of the mighty, and brings down the trusted stronghold.’

ECCLESIASTES AND CITIES

Ecclesiastes 9:14-15. ‘There was a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great snares around it. Now there was found in it a

poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same poor man.'

ISAIAH AND CITIES

Isaiah 14:4 Concerning Babylon. 'How the oppressor has ceased, the golden city ceased!'

Isaiah 14:31 Concerning Philistia. 'Wail O gate! Cry, O city!'

Isaiah 17:1 Concerning Damascus 'Behold, Damascus will cease from being a city, it will be a ruinous heap.'

The word 'city' is mentioned more than 40 times in Isaiah. It is used sometimes to identify God's people. Isaiah 60:14b 'they shall call you The City of the Lord, Zion of the holy one of Israel.'

JEREMIAH AND CITIES

Jeremiah 26:2 'speak to all the cities of Judah ... all the words which I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word. Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil way.'

Jeremiah 29:7 To those Jews who remained captive in Babylon. 'and seek the peace (shalom) of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace'.

Note: 29:6b '..that you may be increased there and not be diminished'.

JONAH AND A CITIES

Jonah 4:11. '...should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left and also much livestock?'

Just as God had compassion for the city of Nineveh so God has compassion for the cities of our day.

ZECHARIAH PROPHESED OF A CITY OF TRUTH

Zechariah 8.

THE GOSPELS AND CITIES

Jesus spoke to, appealed to, compared, rebuked, wept over, cities. Matthew 11:22-24, Luke 10:13-15 (Micah 6:9)

Jesus disciples were sent to cities to prepare a way for their Master. Luke 10:1.

Jesus sent the disciples into cities Luke 10: 8-1. 'Find a man of peace' If they were not received they were to shake the dust off their feet and pronounce judgment over that town.?

Jesus rewards faithful people with cities. Luke 19:17 Well done... you have been faithful in little – have authority over 10 cities.

Jesus warned and reproached cities. Mt.10:15 'it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah – in the day of judgment, than for that city'. 11:20-24 'He began to reproach the cities..'

Jesus' strategy was cities - Mt.9:35 'And *Jesus* went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people'. Mk.1:33,45 'The whole city had gathered at the door.'

THE BOOK OF ACTS AND CITIES

In Acts the gospel brought dramatic change to cities. The gospel affected city after city.

Acts 5:28, You have filled Jerusalem with His teaching.

Acts 8:5,8,14, Phillip went down to the city of Samaria There was great joy in the city. (The Apostles heard that Samaria had received the word of God).

Acts 11:19-26, Antioch, (persecution) great numbers.

Acts 13:14,44; 14:21 Paul's strategy 'And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch'; 15:36.

Acts 19:11-12, 18-20, Ephesus, unusual miracles, the word prevailed.

Note Acts 19:10 where we read, ALL who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord.

Cities as units also rose in opposition - Mt.23:34

'persecute you from city to city'; Acts 7:58 'And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul', 4:27; 13:50; 14:19.

Nearly all of *Paul's* epistles were addressed to the one church in each city.

Paul's missionary journeys focused on urban cities/towns of influence. First missionary journey : 46-48 A.D.

Salamis, Paphos, Perge, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe.

Second missionary journey: 49-52 A.D. Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Troas, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Jerusalem, Antioch. Third missionary journey: 53-57A.D. Galatia, Phrygia, Ephesus, Macedonia, Greece, Troas, Miletus, Cos, Rhodes, Patara, Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea, Jerusalem.

REVELATION AND CITIES

Finally we note that in Revelation *John* writes to seven city churches. *Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea*. Rev. 2-3

LARGE CITIES

Population wise Bible cities were not always that small.

Abraham's city of Ur numbered 250,000. Nineveh took three days to cross on foot. Babylon was an amazing city with its irrigation systems and sophisticated amenities.

Antioch had 16 miles of colonnaded streets. Rome with its 1,000,000 people had 1790 palaces, 30 parks and gardens, 700 public pools, 254 bake houses, 28 libraries etc.

Compared to this in twelfth century Europe. Paris 100,000. Venice 90,000. Florence 45,000. Not until 1820 was there a city in Europe of 1,000,000 ie. London.

GOOD AND BAD CITIES IN THE BIBLE

It is interesting to note how the Bible writers described various cities of their day. Cities were sometimes good, sometimes bad.

Good Cities

Righteous, faithful city Isaiah 1:26

City of praise and joy Jeremiah 49:25

City of perfection, beauty and joy

Lamentations 2:15

Faithful city Zechariah 8:3

City of refuge Numbers 35:14-15

Beloved city Revelation 20:9

Fortified city Jeremiah 1:18

Cities of our God 2 Samuel 10:12

Great City Joshua 10:2

Holy cities Isaiah 64:10

City of the Lord Isaiah 60:14

Great and Godly cities Deuteronomy 6:10

City called JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH

Bad Cities

Rebellious and wicked city Ezra 4:12

City of confusion and chaos Isaiah 24:10

City full of injustice Ezekiel 9:9

Rebellious, defiled, oppressing city Zephaniah 3:1

Waste or ruined city Isaiah 61:4, Ezekiel 36:35

Bloody city Ezekiel 22:2

Undefended city Isaiah 25:2

Divided city Matthew 12: 25, - leads to ruin

Desolate city Jeremiah 9:11

Idolatrous city Acts 17:16

The Lord is there Ezekiel 48:34

TWO STAND OUT CITIES IN SCRIPTURE - JERUSALEM AND BABYLON.

Jerusalem the ideal city, a model city in every way, not just in a religious sense but social, political, economic sense also.

Babylon is seen as a city fully given over to evil.

Oppressive, proud, immoral. . (Gen 11 through to Rev. 17:5) By contrast Jerusalem is seen as the ideal city, socially, economically, spiritually. (Gen. 14 through to Rev. 21:2, although the ideal never existed). Every city has both the good and evil characteristics of Jerusalem and Babylon in them.

Jerusalem means 'foundation of Shalem'. Originally it was called Urushalim or Shalem. (Egyptian texts 1850 B.C.) Shalem was identified with the Canaanite gods of Ashstar and Molech. These gods in turn were the international manifestation of Baal. When David conquered Urushalim he called it Je-rusalem. Je is the Anglicised version of Yah, the abbreviated form of Yahweh. Because Shalem is similar to shalom the city began to be known as the city of peace.

Thus the name Jerusalem gives expression to the tension of every city. That is, every city is the battleground between God and Satan for the domination of its people and its structures. It is *Jeru-salem* or *Je-rusalem*.

It is important therefore to know who GOD, (Yahweh) and Satan, (Baal) are. God is the God of covenant and responsibility and Satan is the god of debauchery and license.

Note: This is not a battle between two equals. God is always triumphant. He creates, loves, abides and conquers.

GOD'S LOVE FOR CITIES.

Gen. 18:22 'Abraham remained standing before the Lord' Early manuscripts read 'The Lord remained standing before Abraham'. If this is the correct reading then the

focus is on the Lord's concern for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah rather than Abraham's.

The Psalms give us an insight into God's love for our cities. 49 psalms can be seen to be city psalms. Here are three psalms that stand out:

Psalm 42, A lament for a city

Psalm 46, Jerusalem, the model city

Psalm 48, The city of praise

See also:

Jonah 3: 1 – 4:11, a clear picture of God's love for a city.

Luke 13: 34 – 35, 19: 41 – 44, presents an even greater picture of God's love for the city.

Isaiah 62: 1 – 5, also show's God's feeling for a city.

Ezek. 16. 1 – 14. The city as a bride. This chapter reveals God's deep love for the city. He married the city, but it turned away from Him.

GOD'S INTENTION FOR OUR CITIES

We have been taught to pray 'Thy kingdom come'. This is God's will for our cities ie. that His kingdom/will be done in our cities. What is God's intention for our cities? That He will take His legitimate place in them as Lord and King.

God wants to put His name over us, our families, and our cities. Being of one accord, corporate worship, faith and obedience will enable Him to put his name over us.

Ezekiel 48:35, "And the name of the city from that day shall be: THE LORD IS THERE."

Jesus said 'Repent for the Kingdom of God is near'. Was Jesus talking about just an ethereal kingdom or a kingdom that would be a visible manifestation of God's rule in all spheres of life in a geographical location? The gospel communicated by Jesus was good news that addressed every sphere of life. I.e. (Political, economic and religious life). A kingdom that would express itself in the 'shalom' of God for all of society.

SHALOM

Shalom is a word that means much more than peace. It means 'a state of wholeness and completeness possessed by a person or a group that includes good health, prosperity, security, justice, and deep spiritual contentment. To wish shalom for the individual could mean, protection in battle, healing if they were sick, long life, prosperity. Shalom for the community related to family, community and nation.

There is no 'shalom' apart from God. It begins with individuals coming into a right relationship with God. Then Christians rightly relating to one another who then live out this 'shalom' in the wider community.

To what extent has the Kingdom of God become embodied and made real in the life, witness and social action of the church in our city?

CITY COMPONENTS

Our cities are basically made up of three systems.

-Political – how we determine to live together.

-Economic – how we choose to create and distribute wealth.

-Religious – essential beliefs, values and basic convictions which help determine and under-gird both the political and the economic components. The Latin root word for religion is 'that which fences about'.

Every society is organized through its religious, political and economic systems. A system describes the body of people organized around values, structures and individuals. Only when individuals, structures and values change do we have systemic change.

DEUTERONOMY: A TEMPLATE

Deuteronomy is the clearest statement in the Bible of cities as God intended them to be. When Josiah heard the Law 2Chronicles 34:19 (which included Deuteronomy) he

repented when he saw how far short Israel and its cities had come. 2Kings 22:3-23. Deuteronomy was the template that the prophets used. It along with Isaiah was the book most used by Jesus to call Israel to accountability.

Deuteronomy highlighted the basic reality of Israelite life, ie. being centred in a relationship with God. Deuteronomy 10:12-13, 17-20. Deut. 6:4-5. A national – relational – culture. They had to live separate from the surrounding nations or be seduced by them.

Deuteronomy addresses wealth, poverty, sabbatical year, the role of the prophet, teaching children. They were to be a 'shalom' community. 'Shalom' is a corporate word that addresses the well being of the entire community. It is a political, economic and religious word. When Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God He was speaking of the full living out of 'shalom' upon the earth. 'Shalom' is the identifying mark of the authentic church. It is God's design for our neighbourhood, our school, our business, our city, our nation, you and me! ⁶

TRANSFORMATION

The biblical concept of Shalom gives meaning to the term 'transformation'. Today we often hear the terms 'transformed cities' or 'transformed nations'. What is it all about?

Here are some definitions:

'A Transformed City' is one where the character and influence of the kingdom of God is resident in His people and lived out through their lives and relationships in such way, that they staff the systems of the city, visibly, and measurably impact all aspects of life in and of the city.'

Tom White of Frontline Ministries says, "Community Transformation' is the measurable supernatural impact of

⁶ Nearly all the material under the previous six headings comes from City of God City of Satan Robert Linthicum Zondervan 1991

the presence and power of God on human society, sacred and secular. In the church, this is characterized by increased holiness of life, accelerated conversion growth, reconciliation in relationships, mobilization of gifts, and callings, and an increased relevance to and participation in greater society. In the culture, this may be characterized by pervasive awareness of the reality of God, a radical correction of social ills, a commensurate decrease in crime rates (evidence of authentic biblical justice, as described in Isaiah 58), supernatural blessing on local commerce, healing of the broken-hearted (the alienated and disenfranchised), and an exporting of kingdom righteousness. To this end, a catalytic core of saints typically embrace a lifestyle of persistent repentance, humility, prayer and sacrificial servanthood that attracts the favour and presence of God, and breaks the predominating influences of the ruling power of structures of human flesh and the devil.”

True transformation according to *Chuck Pierce of Glory of Zion Ministries* has a measurable impact on the wider community. He says ‘It is marked by:

Accelerated church life. An increase in souls won.

Reconciliation and healing within and without the Body of Christ. The church’s increasing relevance in society. A greater God awareness in the streets. Radical Christianity.

Decreasing criminal activity. An exporting of righteousness’.

REVIEW:

God created cities.

God loves cities.

God has committed cities to us and expects us to be responsible for their stewardship and development. God sees that cities are central to His plan for the redemption of humanity.

God has compassion for our cities.
Satan contends for cities therefore we must understand
the nature of evil in our cities.

*The text under the next five headings is from 'City of God
City of Satan' Robert Linthicum*

OUR CITIES ARE THE ABODE OF PERSONAL AND SYSTEMIC EVIL

Every city has a 'spirit' about it. It has to do with the city's history, events, people who settled and influenced the city, surroundings etc. To understand a city we must begin to grasp an understanding of both the city's goodness and its evil. When individuals continue in sin they begin to open the city to systemic evil. Unless we understand these things we will not be effective in that ministry which God has called us to in the city. Corporate, systemic evil is far more powerful than individual evil or sin.

In his book City of God, City of Satan, Robert Linthicum tells the story of Eva. Eva was a young Christian girl forced into a prostitution ring. Her tragic story caused the writer to know that his theology was inadequate. That if the church does not deal with systems and structures of evil it will not be effective in transforming the lives of the city's individuals. What was needed was a theology that would be equal to the challenge of dealing with individual and corporate sin.

THRONES, DOMINIONS, PRINCIPALITIES, POWERS

In the New Testament Paul is the author of nine letters to eight city churches ... they were in danger of dying if they could not be assertive in the culture of the day... these letters are like text books on city ministry. In his letter to the Colossians Paul refers in Col. 2:14 -16 to thrones, dominions, principalities, powers ... visible and invisible. The heavenly spheres have their counterparts on earth. The church is to make God's wisdom known to them:

- A throne represents the institution of power in a state, city, or economic body ...
 - Dominion is the throne's territory ...
 - Principality is the specific person(s) ...
 - Power, the rules, legal basis for ruling.
- NOTE: One word in the O.T. for city is the Hebrew word IYR which means 'a place to be guarded'
Hence the need for leaders and people to be united. It highlights the need also for an eldership who will rule wisely and faithfully 'in the gates'.

WHAT DID JESUS DO FOR THE CITY?

So far we have talked about, the city biblically. We have talked about the city as an object of God's love, the city and its need to repent and submit to God's rule in every sphere and the city's systems and inhabitants. Now we deal with the city and what Christ has done for it by looking first at 'Jesus and Jerusalem' then 'Jesus and Our Cities'

--- A. JESUS AND JERUSALEM

'From that time on Jesus made it clear to His disciples that He was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously at the hands of the chief priests and scribe, to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day.' Matt. 16:21 J.B.

See Luke 13: 34 – 35. 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ..' plus Matt. 23: 37 – 49, Luke 19:41 – 44. Note: God's patience with the city. God's cry for the city. The city's corporate rejection of God.

Jesus mission on earth culminated in Jerusalem. Jesus went into a city (Jerusalem) to die. It was the city most brooded over by Satan and God. The archetypal, representative city that symbolized all cities. Jesus had to go to Jerusalem to die.

Jesus died not just for the salvation of individuals but all of creation (that includes cities).

Read Romans 8: 18 – 23. All of creation was affected by the fall. Genesis 3: 17 – 22.

Colossians 1: 15 – 20 tells us that Christ has ‘reconciled all things’. The entire cosmos has been reconciled and is being filled with the creative power and presence of Christ. Note John 3:16 ‘God so loved the cosmos that He gave ...’ 1Corinthians 5:18 NIV ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself’

... B. JESUS AND OUR CITIES

Only Jesus can save a city. Rom. 8:3 ‘It is through Jesus Christ, Paul declares, that God has fulfilled the obligations of all systems. All the demands that our systems make on us, all the demands that the spectre of death and corruptibility of our own personalities make upon us have been met and satisfied in Christ. In His death, Christ has met all the conditions of the law, all the conditions of the systems. He faced the worst death for us, He plumbed the depths of human depravity – both individual and collective depravity. In that condescending act Christ took upon Himself all that personal, corporate and systemic evil could ever do. By taking, such evil upon Himself, Christ has liberated us – and the city – from evil’s complex grasp. And that is what Christ has done for our cities!! Jesus came to die for the city, its systems, and its people. And Christ asks us to participate in what he has done. We are to take up our cross and follow him into the city – there be willing to minister, to suffer and if need be lose our lives. His death was not an esoteric exercise occurring at the limits of our understanding. It was a death coming out of great love and intense commitment to the city, its systems and its people. So it is that Christ demands of those who would follow Him into the city that they have this same level of commitment to the city’s afflicted and comfortable and the exploiters and exploited of its

systems, its principalities and powers. Jesus was crucified on a city's garbage heap!⁷

WINNING OUR CITIES

THE STARTING POINT - THE CITY CHURCH

God's intention is to redeem nations, city by city. The vehicle of redemption within each city is the church. We find but one church in each city. In the N.T. the church of a city is defined by the name of the city as is seen in the following scriptures:

ONE CITY – ONE CHURCH

Church in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1)

Church in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1)

Church in Ephesus (Rev. 1:11; 2:1)

Church in Smyrna (Rev. 1:11; 2:8)

Church in Pergamos (Rev. 1:11; 2:12)

Church in Thyatira (Rev. 1:11; 2:18)

Church in Sardis (Rev. 1:11; 3:1)

Church in Philadelphia (Rev. 1:11; 3:7)

Church in Laodicea (Rev. 1:11; 3:14)

Church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1; 11:22)

Church in Antioch (Acts 13:1)

On the other hand 'churches' plural is used when referring to a number of city churches in one province or region:

Churches in Galilee (Acts 9:31)

Churches in Judea (Acts 9:31)

Churches in Samaria (Acts 9:31)

Churches in Cilicia (Acts 15:41)

Churches in Syria (Acts 15:41)

Churches in Asia (1 Cor. 16:19; Rev. 1:4)

Churches in Galatia (Gal. 1:2)

⁷ Material under previous 5 headings from City of God City of Satan Robert Linthicum Zondervan 1991

OUR HERITAGE: THE DOWN SIDE

The early church was a dynamic, vibrant, corporate unit impacting the city of its residence. Today, particularly in western nations, we have many 'churches' in one city often unconnected and isolated from each other. One of the primary reasons for this is in the way in which 'churches' in our cities/towns began. For instance in Australia and New Zealand Europeans came and built towns – cities and they brought with them their own denominational affiliations. The denominational churches that were thus founded in our cities and towns did a great work and established a godly heritage. But these denominational churches have tended to remain separate, isolated entities.

We need to remember that most denominations began powerfully at their place of origin – with the word of God. They were prophetic and many of them paid a great price. Leaders and others were martyred. Anabaptists drowned, Methodists stoned, Pentecostals were abused and rejected. But gradually the truths they stood for were received and many parts of the Body embraced the truths they fought for. Once they were part of the answer but now they become part of the problem if they remain totally given over to their spheres and not the body of Christ as a whole.

LOCAL CHURCH: A GOOD DEFINITION

It is extremely important that we have a biblical understanding of 'local church' and that we rediscover what it means to be the church of the city. Here is a definition of local church that would seem to be in line with scripture:

'The local church is the sum of believers in a given area, a body of people irrevocably joined to one another without barriers of age, race, background – together expressing the life of Christ to the community around them. This does not preclude a variety of local expressions of church – but

these expressions will be facets of one local entity. This is the local church that the Spirit is working to restore at this moment in history.

While many adhere to this definition, in theory, the practice is often very different. Their own congregation is often a self contained, independent structure with respect to vision and mission.

Each congregation must ask itself a fundamental question about how it views its life and ministry. Does it operate out of an independent mindset, expressing a unilateral mindset with only a secondary or optional regard for what is going on locally? Congregational leadership must recognize that its own destiny and success is irrevocably tied with all other groups in that area and the whole church world-wide.’⁸

WHY IS UNITY IN OUR CITIES SO IMPORTANT?

Here are some reasons:

1. IT IS GOD’S WILL. It is God’s fervent will and desire.

John 17:21-23.

2. EFFECTIVE PRAYER AND WORSHIP. It is a pre-requisite to effective, city-changing worship, imprecatory prayers and the judgments of God. Ps 149, Ps 122.

3. HEALTH AND WHOLENESS. It is a pre-requisite to the healing of our cities. II Kings 2:19-22 Here Elisha is requested to bring healing to a city. He asks for salt which is to be placed into a new bowl. The salt then brings healing to the bad water and barren soil. Salt represents integrity, cohesiveness and loyalty.

4. FRUITFUL EVANGELISM It is a pre-requisite to fruitful evangelism. John 13:34,35. Jesus said that by our love for one another ‘all men will know’. (A well known South American evangelist, Carlos Annacondia, has said that when there is 10% unity there is 10% fruit, 50% unity and there is 50% fruit and so on.)

⁸ Phil and Lynne Townend The Bridge phil@thebridge.cforce9.co.uk

5. **DISPLACING DARKNESS.** It is a pre-requisite to displacing the darkness in our cities. In his letter to the Ephesians – Paul dealt with unity in various areas before he dealt with spiritual warfare in Chapter 6. Note the unity sequence. --chp.2 ethnic unity, chp. 3 unity among Christians, chp. 4 unity in ministry, chp. 5 unity in marriage, chp.6 unity in family & workplace. *Then* spiritual warfare.

6. **FRUITFUL RELATIONSHIPS.** It is a pre-requisite to a credible and fruitful relationship with civic leaders. Haggai 2:1,2. **THIS IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT.** Civic leaders are Gods appointment – Romans 13. They need to be honoured and served. The church must seek to work alongside and with civic leaders as much as possible. In this way the purposes of God for our cities will be advanced.

7. **GOD'S PRESENCE AND GLORY.** It is a pre-requisite to our cities experiencing God's powerful presence and glory. A good understanding of this comes when we realize that the glory of God came after the uniting of God's people, the completion of the temple and acceptable worship. Eg. Solomon's Temple dedication. II Chron 5:11-14

Note: also Ezek 37, unity then the glory Ezek 40.

Note: also Acts 2 where the Holy Spirit came when the 120 were of one accord.

Note: Our problem is not so much the powers of darkness. It is rather the absence of the presence of God and His glory.

WATCHMAN NEE ON UNITY

Highlighting the importance of unity well known author Watchman Nee, sights the work of stone masons in Fukien, China. 'Fukien is famous for its masonry work in that province. Masons in that province are able to cut irregular stones and put them together beautifully. Unlike

the stone walls on Kuling Mountain which are composed of stones piled together, these stones in Fukien are carefully hewed and fitted compactly together. The question in these skilled workers minds is not whether a stone is big or small, nice looking or ugly; rather, it is how this or that stone fits with the other stones? Can these stones be built into a house?’⁷

Concerning the absence of the manifest presence of God and His desire for a dwelling place, Nee also wrote ‘God wants a corporate church, a spiritual home. He does not want isolated, individual stones or bricks. He desires a body not just a member. He wants Christ to have pre-eminence in the church, to be her Head....God’s aim is the church. What He purposes to obtain is the New Jerusalem...He takes the Church, which New Jerusalem represents, and puts a unit in each city. Before New Jerusalem descends from heaven, God wants to have a miniature Jerusalem in each city. This is to say that He wants to have a church in each city to manifest His eternal purpose. From start to finish, the greatest work of God is to build up the body of Christ...’⁹

BEING OF ONE ACCORD

Again and again the New Testament church is referred to as being of ‘one accord’. The Greek word used for ‘one accord’ is ‘humo-thumadon’ (Strong’s 3661) from - humou (3674) - meaning at the same place or time together and ‘thumos’ (2372) - (cf. thermos) meaning passion, fierceness, indignation, wrath and ‘thuo’ – (2380) meaning to rush, breathe hard, blow smoke sacrifice. Obviously this Greek word for one accord is intended to convey a sense of passionate togetherness in the following verses:

Acts 1:14 These all continued with *one accord* in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

⁹ The Church and the Work Watchman Nee Christian Fellowship Publishers 1982

Acts 2:1 Now when the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with *one accord* in one place.

Acts 2:46 So continuing daily with *one accord* in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

Acts 4:24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with *one accord* and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them,

Acts 5:12-13 And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with *one accord* in Solomon's Porch. 13 Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.

Acts 8:6 And the multitudes with *one accord* heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

Acts 15:25 it seemed good to us, being assembled with *one accord*, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

Phil 2:2 fulfil my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of *one accord*, of one mind.

And in a similar vein, Rom 15:5-7 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, 6 that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

BEING OF ONE ACCORD THE CHURCH THEN BECOMES AN EFFECTIVE 'EKKLESIA'

Matt. 16:18-19. 'I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'. Church in Greek is 'ekklesia'. Today this can be interpreted as a church service, a building, a local congregation or more rightly, the people of God called out from the world. But it is more than that.

Originally to the Greeks it meant an assembly of people called out, set apart to govern the affairs of the state or nation. To the Romans it was a group of people sent into a conquered region to alter values, culture and lifestyle until it became like Roman values, culture and lifestyle. They infiltrated government, the social structure, language, schools until the people talked, thought, acted like the Romans.

Jesus was unquestionably speaking of a people that together would extend His government, rule on earth. His 'ekklesia' would be more powerful than the gates of hell. Jesus would give keys that would lock the governmental gates of hell and unlock the governmental gates of heaven.

One of the keys has to be unity. Only a united church, 'ekklesia', of the city can effectively overcome in the 'gates' of their city or town and so see his Name made great in that place.

ILLUSTRATION.

A church elder was denied a loan after which he became aware of a conspiracy between banks, council and insurance companies to deny loans in order to facilitate a hidden agenda for their city. Churches found a relational power to enforce righteousness which they did with powerful effect. (We can make the mistake of addressing symptoms rather than the cause).

THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME INTERESTING BIBLICAL OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING CITIES

1. Each city has it's own unique personality and city destiny (see Rev. 1-3)
2. Each city has it's own cry that ascends to Heaven – God hears that cry (see Gen. 18:21; Isa. 14:3)
3. God measures, limits and judges the integrity of each city (see Matt. 11:20-24; 23:35-38)

4. God uses various means to speak to each city (see Prov. 1:20-21; 8:1-7; Micah 6:9)
5. God prepares, anoints and sends specific ministries to specific cities (see Jonah 1:2; Luke 9:1-56)
6. God has a master key for each individual city (see John 4; Acts 14:27; 2 Cor. 2:12)
7. God sets the church to stand in the gap and intercede for the city (see Gen. 18,19; Ezek. 9:1-7; 22:30,37)
8. God deals with the church about how it relates to the city (see Rev. 1-3)
9. God holds the elders of the city responsible for its spiritual state (see Deut. 19:11-12; 21:1-9; Ezek. 3:17-21; 33:1-9)
10. God weeps over the city's spiritual destiny (see Luke 19:41) ¹⁰

LESSONS FROM PAUL RE STANDING STRONG IN A CITY

EPHESIANS

When Paul wrote to the Christians in the city of Ephesus he was in prison in Rome nearing the end of his time on earth. He was thinking about the church in Ephesus and all the anti – kingdom forces in the city that were confronting it. He knew that the ‘Baal’ culture of the city would weaken and destroy the church or the church would powerfully salt the culture surrounding it. What could he say to the church of Ephesus? First he tells the Christians of the city who they are in Christ and what they have in Christ. He tells them - though the world around you seems in chaos and to be disintegrating you are: Chapter 1:3:

- Blessed of God in heavenly places
- Chosen Forgiven Accepted Redeemed Adopted
- Sealed with the Holy Spirit, the Guarantee of our inheritance
- Included in His plans to gather all things in Christ

¹⁰ Frank Damazio Portland Bible Temple (Teaching Notes)

Note that these are all corporate words. There is not one noun or pro-noun that is singular.

Chapter 1:15:

THEREFORE..(*The reason for all the above*) *I pray* you will understand the nature of your call and the incredible greatness of God's power. The power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him in the place of honour. Jesus is far above any ruler, authority, power, leader - THE CONFRONTING STATEMENT! All authority belongs to Him - He is head over all things for the benefit of the church.

Chapter 2:

Then Paul contrasts what they were to what they have now. Though they be Gentile and Jew they are nevertheless one new man. They need to realize that the evidence of authentic Christianity is found in community. Paul says 'you are now one temple for God to dwell in, in Ephesus'. The Ephesian Christians are to be free from unthinking servitude to the world's systems.

Chapter 3.

God's plan.. to reveal His wisdom to unseen rulers and authorities in heavenly places through the church... '*When I think of this I fall to my knees and pray for you*' (plural) - Power. '*That from His unlimited resources He will empower you* (plural) *with inner strength*'.

- Rooted in love

- Filled with God

Now unto Him be all glory. He who is able, through His mighty power at work within us (corporately) to do infinitely more than we might ask or think.

IN CHAPTER 1-3 we discover how God sees us the church, His people in a city. NOW IN CHAPTERS 4-6 Paul shows us how we are to live as His people in a city – 'Be humble, be patient, be united. Build one another up in love. Don't live as the gentiles do. Be truthful. Live in Forgiveness. Establish a good work ethic. Don't entertain any form of

impurity. Expose all works of darkness. Make sure you have strong marriage and family relationships as well as strong employer, employee relationships'. Paul is seeking to move the Ephesians on toward being a more 'shalom' community SO THAT they together could bring Christ to the wider community.

NOW. Chapter 6:10-24, the last word. 'Now stand firm together (no community – no Christianity) against evil rulers and authorities in the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world and against evil spirits in heavenly places'. In other words the systemic evil! The church in the city is at war with principalities and powers that seek to possess the political and value sustaining systems of this world.

In 'Powers, Weakness and the Tabernacled of God' Marva J Dawn says of Ephesians 6 that verse 10 offers a plea using three different Greek words for being strong in the Lord and in the strength of His power ..endunamoo, kratos and ischus. In defining these words Dawn maintains putting on the armour is not the work of individual Christians so much as that of the whole Body of the Church. The verb form from endunamoo is a second person plural imperative, so it literally commands 'be empowered, all of you together'.

The battle is not only totally dependent upon God but it is won only when the church of the city stands firm together.

The church has not carried out its calling from God if all it seeks to do is win souls and plant congregations. Insulation leads to marginalization and eventually disintegration of the church. Paul had laid a foundation that gave both a theology of corporate church life and the courage to live out that life in the wider community.

THE RESULT

According to historical records the early church did bring transformation to many cities. Professor Rodney Stark, has written a definitive study of the major cities of the Roman Empire AD 1 – AD 300. In it he outlines the positive changes Christianity brought over that time to those cities. Evangelism of the Roman Empire through the Christianization of its cities was the story of the early church. He writes, “Christianity served as a revitalization movement that arose in response to the misery, chaos, fear and brutality of life in the urban Greco-Roman world. . . . Christianity revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent problems. To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachment. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fire, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services. . . . For what they brought was not simply an urban movement, but a new culture capable of making life in Greco-Roman cities tolerable ... Paganism collapsed under its own sinful weight and Christianity had simply been Christianity.”¹¹

Paul’s letter had laid a good foundation, he addressed:

1. Who they were.
2. What they were called to and up against.
3. How they were to go about it.

HAVING VISION FOR OUR CITIES

Prov. 29.18

1. We must have a clear, shared, compelling vision of Gods intention for our community.

¹¹ The Rise and Fall of Christianity Rodney Stark Harper Collins 1997

2. If there is an absence of corporate vision, there will be independent initiatives that produce short term, but no long term change.
 3. Shared vision will be embraced when the purpose of unity is clear. The purpose of unity is that disciples can be made of all nations ie. people groups.
 4. Shared vision will be developed by leaders who have passion for a unified Body mobilised for action.
 5. Shared vision will be developed by leaders who are in relationship with one another. Who are willing to listen to brothers & sisters who have different perspectives. Only then will they see the whole.
 6. Shared vision will be developed by leaders who contribute to the whole while maintaining the health and well being of their own sphere. As leaders unify around a shared vision, various needs will emerge, eg. prayer, the poor. No one congregation can do it all. Each one will have a passion for some part - perhaps in co-operation with one or more congregations. All endeavours need to be coordinated.
 7. Shared vision will be achieved as progress is measured and monitored. We have done this as congregations with budgets, conversions, etc. but we need to think of progress in our city. How far have we come in meeting the spiritual & physical needs of the city? Eg. souls saved, crime decreased etc.
 8. Shared vision will be developed by ongoing, never ceasing intercession.
- Left to ourselves we will destroy or manipulate the thing God is doing. As we pray in unity, God will reveal His plans. Without a comprehensive prayer network, vision that emerges will not be sustained.¹²

¹² Source Unknown

SOME PRACTICAL STEPS FROM NEHEMIAH.

When he heard of the devastation that had taken place at Jerusalem...

1. Nehemiah listened, heard the report of those who had witnessed first hand the dreadful state of Jerusalem. Neh. 1:2,3. People had lost their cultural identity. Broken down corporate life was a greater problem than broken down walls.

2. Nehemiah looked to God. Neh. 1:4. We must look to Jesus. The church is not the saviour of the city. Jesus is. Nehemiah prayed. He internalized the pain. Authentic anger is the process over the injustice people are suffering. His prayer included identification and supplication for clarity over the state of Jerusalem.

3. He understood the value of timing. The behind the scene work took about six months.

4. He began to think pray about resources. He was cup bearer to the king. This role was similar to that of a prime minister. He approached king Artaxerxes and made his request. Neh. 2:4-8. He received:

- a. Permission to go to Jerusalem.
- b. Authorization to rebuild the walls.
- c. A guarantee of safe passage.
- d. Materials to build with.
- e. Letters from the king to appropriate govt. officials.

5. He built networks, Neh. 2:9-18. By visiting people along the way to get their cooperation. By building relationships with people upon his arrival in Jerusalem.

6. He personally assesses the condition of the wall. Neh. 2:11-16

7. He called a great public meeting. Political, economic and religious spheres were represented. He bided his time and began where the people were at. Ie. Perceived issues.

8. The people began to take ownership. 'Let *us* start building'. Neh. 2:18. Rule number one. Don't disempower

people by doing everything yourself. They built with families each taking responsibility for a section of the wall. 9. They celebrated the beginnings at the Sheep gate. Neh. 3:18. Celebrate small victories. 10. Together they confronted and beat the systems. The political. Sanballat – governor. The economic. Tobiah. The mocking, violence, threat of a coup, betrayal in the form country-men as loan sharks. 11. Full on celebration. Neh. 6: 15–16. Discover the city's joy Nehemiah 8:9-12. Be the cheer leader in the city, we cannot be overwhelmed by the city's evil.

NOTE: An Important Key from Nehemiah - Relational Power: We are not called to minister to the city. People are not to be seen as objects rather we are to build mutual relationships with them. We must do ministry with them otherwise our actions are patronizing. When the church seeks to solve people's problems by providing social services to them but does not challenge the systemic sources of those problems, it is addressing the symptoms rather than the causes. ... When the church refuses to challenge the systemic sources of the problems its services are meant to alleviate, it actually contributes to the maintenance and sustenance of the dominating political, economic and religious systems it is called by God to challenge. Nehemiah listened to and worked with the city. It takes time and effort to build relationships and trust.

Ministering to the city, erodes confidence, does not encourage a sense of responsibility, deepens any sense of powerlessness and lack of self worth, addresses the symptoms rather than the source of the problems, and contributes to the maintenance of the dominating political, economic and religious systems.

In building relationships we must not put an agenda 'on' people. We must learn their agenda – pain, issues, problems, needs, joys, hopes. What are

their concerns? Who do they perceive to be the real leaders? Who has a real burden for the church and the community?

Nehemiah was an OT example of a person who built relationally, but Jesus is our supreme example.

He committed undivided time.

He affirmed people.

He challenged individuals to an action or decision and to think through their situation.

He used the situation to teach that person.

The wall was rebuilt in 52 days after being demolished for 141 years. Why had someone not said 'enough is enough'. They lacked a Nehemiah! ¹³

FURTHER PRACTICAL STEPS:

A practical starting point for reaching our cities is to ask God to reveal to us His heart. We must know and feel something of God's love for our cities. Otherwise we cannot minister to them effectively. How can we do this?

1. Prayerfully spend time looking at a map of your city.
2. Ask God to help us see your city through His eyes. Eyes of love. Maybe ask Him to show you part of the city or part of the city's activity that He is concerned about.
3. Appreciate and be thankful for, celebrate all, the great things about your city.
4. Let God show you why He placed you and in your city (in terms of the corporate mission that is to be lived out through the redeemed community).
5. Ask God to help you discern, stand against systemic evil in our city, to live God's way.
6. Very important. We need to ask God to help us be His Body, His presence in the city.
7. Walk about the city. Enjoy the city. Linger and imbibe the city. Ask God for further insight.

¹³ Transforming Power. Linthicum, Robert. InterVarsity Press: 2003.

8. Read one of the passages related to God's love for the city already mentioned and meditate on it. Let God tell you why He has drawn you to certain places. Write down your impressions in a notebook. ¹⁴

Remember God is bigger than the city and the city's needs! ... **Compiled by Colin Shaw**

¹⁴ Adapted from Transforming Power, Robert Linthicum.