ZION

"Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion ... the city of the great King."

PSALM 48:2

A city whose builder and maker is God.

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yovelpublications@gmail.com

yovelpublications.com

Scripture quotations are based principally on the King James Version, with occasional adjustments for clarity and to reflect the underlying Hebrew or Greek.

A WORD TO THE READER

A Longing For Zion



There are some words in Scripture that seem to carry more weight than a single word should be able to bear.

Zion is one of them.

For many people today the word immediately suggests politics, territory, modern Israel or Zionism. Those associations are understandable, but they are very recent when placed beside the age of the biblical word itself.

Zion is far older than Zionism.

Long before modern political movements existed, David sang of Zion. The prophets wept over her, rejoiced over her and foretold her restoration. Exiles remembered her beside the rivers of Babylon. Abraham, long before David ever captured the stronghold that would bear the name, was already looking beyond the visible world for something greater:

A city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

So before asking what men have made of Zion, perhaps we should ask a more important question:

What does God mean by Zion?

Scripture gives an extraordinary answer.

Zion is a mountain and a City. She is spoken of as a Mother and as a Daughter. She waits for a King. She is promised children. The nations come to her light. A Stone is laid within her. A Deliverer is associated with her. The Lamb stands upon her. And when John is finally invited to behold the Bride, the Lamb's wife, he is shown a City descending from God.

At the beginning of the Bible, mankind is driven from a garden. At the end of the Bible, the garden has become a City. The river of life has returned. The tree of life has returned. The curse is gone. The Lamb is there. God dwells with His people. And the long pilgrimage is over.

This booklet is therefore not primarily about politics. It is about promise. It is about the vision that drew Abraham from his homeland, caused David to sing, made the prophets cry aloud, sustained the exiles and finally opened before John in glory.

It is about the Kingdom of God. It is about the King. It is about home.

It is about Zion.

ONE

ZIONISTS, ZIONISM AND ZION

Let Scripture Define the Word

Words gather histories around themselves.

Few biblical words have accumulated more modern associations than Zion.

A Zionist, in the ordinary modern sense, is one who supports Zionism; and Zionism developed as a modern Jewish national movement concerned with restoration to the ancestral homeland and the establishment and preservation of a Jewish state.

Whatever view one takes of that history, one distinction is essential:

Zion did not begin with Zionism.

Jewish longing for Jerusalem is vastly older than the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is embedded in Jewish prayer, in the Passover hope of Jerusalem, in the Psalms and in the prophets. Yet even that ancient human longing is not the beginning of Zion's meaning. The beginning lies with God.

The first narrative use of the name occurs when David captures the stronghold of Zion, "the city of David." But Scripture does not leave Zion as merely the name of an ancient fortress. The word grows.

Zion becomes the holy mountain. The place of the King. The dwelling desired by God. The City to which the nations will come. The Mother whose children return. The Daughter who waits for her King. The City of

the Living God. The Heavenly Jerusalem. Finally, she appears within the great bridal vision at the end of Revelation.

Why? Psalm 132 gives us the heart of it:

> ***For the LORD hath chosen Zion;***
> ***he hath desired her for his habitation.***
> ***This is my rest for ever:***
> ***here will I dwell; for I have desired her.***
>
> Psalm 132:13-14

That may be the most important statement in the whole story.

The biblical story of Zion is ultimately not about man's attempt to reach God. It is about God's desire to dwell with man.

The theme runs through Scripture. In Eden, God walks with mankind. In the wilderness, the Tabernacle stands in the midst of Israel. Later comes the Temple. Then the prophets speak increasingly of Zion as the place of God's presence and reign. Finally Revelation announces:

> ***Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them.***

The beginning and the end belong together. Scripture opens with God dwelling with mankind in the garden, and it closes with the declaration that the dwelling of God is with men. Between Eden and the New Jerusalem runs the long story of separation, covenant, Tabernacle, Temple, exile, restoration and redemption. Zion stands within that story as the great biblical language of God's desire to dwell among His people. What was lost in Eden is not abandoned; in the City of God it is restored and brought to fullness.

Yet the greater destiny of Zion does not require us to pretend that her earthly story never mattered. Scripture does not establish the spiritual by denying the natural and historical. Rather, God works through real places, real people and real history, and through them reveals a purpose greater than any one stage of the story. Abraham is promised land and yet looks for a heavenly City. Jerusalem is earthly and historical, yet Hebrews speaks of the heavenly Jerusalem.

The Bible is comfortable holding both. The earthly promise is not made meaningless by the heavenly fulfilment, nor is the heavenly fulfilment made less glorious because God revealed it through the natural and historical. The visible promise becomes a vessel through which the greater purpose of God is made known.

And long before there was a Davidic city called Zion, a wandering man was already looking beyond the horizon. His name was Abraham.

And he was looking for the City.

TWO

ABRAHAM LOOKED FOR A CITY

Whose Builder and Maker Is God

God called Abraham out.

Out of his country. Out of his kindred. Out of his father's house.

And the promise was immense: a land, a seed, a name, and through him blessing for all the families of the earth.

Abraham obeyed. But there is something curious about his life in the land of promise. He never settles as though the story is complete. He lives in tents. He builds altars, not cities. He remains, in the language of Hebrews, a stranger in the very land God had promised him.

Why?

For he looked for a city which hath foundations,
whose builder and maker is God.

Abraham stood in the land and yet looked beyond what his eyes could see.

This does not cancel the land promise. Hebrews itself calls it "the land of promise." Rather, Abraham understood that the visible promise belonged to something larger. He was looking for permanence. A City with foundations. Not another Ur. Not another Sodom. Not something built by men and destined eventually to crumble. A City built by God.

Hebrews continues by describing Abraham and the other faithful as strangers and pilgrims who confessed that they sought a country. Had they merely wished to return to the land from which they came, they could have gone back. But they desired:

A better country, that is, an heavenly.

Hebrews 11:16

Then comes one of Scripture's most beautiful statements:

Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God:
for he hath prepared for them a city.

Hebrews 11:16

Abraham looked for a City.
God prepared a City.

The pilgrim's longing and God's preparation meet.

And Abraham's calling was never intended to end with Abraham. God had said, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." The promise moved through one man toward many nations. Abraham was called out. The nations would one day be called in. And at the centre of that great gathering Scripture increasingly places Zion.

There is also a mountain in Abraham's story. Moriah. There, a father ascends with his beloved son. The wood is laid upon the son. A sacrifice is required. God provides. And Abraham calls the place YHVH Yireh - 'The LORD will provide.' Generations later Solomon would build the house of the LORD at Mount Moriah. The mountain of sacrifice and the place of God's dwelling begin to touch.

Abraham therefore gives Zion something essential before Zion is even named. He gives her the character of pilgrimage. He teaches us that the promises of God should not make us more satisfied with what men can build. They should make us look further.

For the man who possessed promises still lived in a tent - because he was waiting for a City.

But Abraham was not alone. The promise came through a woman whose body appeared incapable of producing the future God had declared. Her name was Sarah.

And through her Scripture will teach us to see not only the City - but the Mother of us all.

THREE

SARAH AND THE JERUSALEM ABOVE

The Mother of Us All

Sarah was barren.

That fact dominates much of her story. God had promised Abraham descendants, yet the years passed and the promise became biologically absurd.

Then Isaac was born. Not because human strength had finally solved the problem, but because God had spoken. Hebrews remembers Sarah as receiving strength to conceive because she judged Him faithful who had promised. That is the heart of faith: the visible impossibility did not become the measure of the promise; the faithfulness of the One who promised did. Sarah could not produce the future by her own strength, but God could bring life where human possibility had ended.

The barren woman became the mother of a people.

Centuries later Paul takes the stories of Sarah and Hagar and uses them to speak about two Jerusalems. One is associated with bondage. Then he writes:

But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

Galatians 4:26

That sentence deserves to be heard slowly.

Jerusalem which is above.
Mother.

Paul then immediately quotes Isaiah 54: "Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not..." This is no accidental quotation. Isaiah 54 speaks to a barren woman and commands her to sing before the children appear. She must enlarge the place of her tent. Stretch the curtains. Lengthen the cords. Strengthen the stakes. Why? Because children are coming.

There is something wonderfully appropriate about this imagery in the light of Sarah. Sarah herself had lived in tents. Now the prophetic barren woman is told to enlarge her tent because the family will become greater than expected.

Then Isaiah says:

For thy Maker is thine husband.

The language deepens. The God who is Builder and Maker of Abraham's City is also described as Husband to the woman. And Isaiah's woman begins to take on the features of a City. Her stones are laid. Her foundations are beautified. Her gates are established. Her children are taught of the LORD.

Woman and City begin to merge.

Isaiah 49 develops the image further. Zion laments, "The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." But God answers with maternal language of His own. Can a woman forget the child she nurses? Then Zion begins to see her children returning. She looks around in astonishment and asks:

Who hath begotten me these?

The abandoned woman discovers that she is surrounded by children. Isaiah 60 sees the same restoration:

Thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side.

The heart of Zion is enlarged. Her family is returning.

Sarah's story and Zion's story share the same rhythm: barrenness, promise, waiting, impossible life, children beyond expectation.

The important point is not that Israel disappears into something else. The prophets do not celebrate Zion's replacement. They celebrate her restoration. The abandoned woman is not discarded. She is comforted. The Mother does not lose her identity. She discovers her children.

Psalm 87 then says something astonishing of Zion:

This and that man was born in her.

God Himself records the peoples.

The City has become a birthplace.
The mountain has become a mother.

Abraham looked for the City. Sarah has helped us see the Mother. And now Scripture begins to fill that Mother with sons and daughters.

FOUR

THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF ZION

This Man Was Born There

A mother is known by her children.

Again and again the prophets describe Zion's restoration in the language of family. Children scattered. Children remembered. Children returning. Children carried home. Children taught by the LORD.

Psalm 87 gives us one of the most remarkable visions. Zion stands among the nations - Egypt, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre and Ethiopia - and of people from among them it is said:

This man was born there.

Then:

The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there.

Zion is not merely a destination. She has become a birthplace.

Isaiah hears God commanding the four points of the compass:

Bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth.

They belong to God. They are gathered to Zion. God calls. Zion receives. The children come home.

Isaiah 66 makes the maternal imagery almost overwhelming. Zion travails. She gives birth. Children appear suddenly. Then Jerusalem herself is spoken of as a mother who nurses and comforts:

As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

Isaiah 54 adds, "All thy children shall be taught of the LORD." And here another great theme joins the family image. Abraham was commanded to teach his household the way of the LORD. Now the children of Zion are taught by God. Then Isaiah 2 sees the nations themselves coming to the mountain and saying:

He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.

Zion is becoming the schoolhouse of the Kingdom.

The children rejoice there. Joel calls upon the children of Zion to rejoice in the LORD. Psalm 149 declares:

Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.

There is the next great development. The children do not merely rejoice in the City. They rejoice in their King.

Zechariah speaks of the sons of Zion, and even names Judah and Ephraim within the same prophetic movement. The divided family is not forgotten. Restoration moves toward reunion.

The prophets also speak repeatedly of the daughters of Zion, but another expression emerges with even greater force: Daughter Zion. The whole

City is now personified as a woman. She mourns. She sits in the dust. She rises. She clothes herself. She rejoices. She waits.

Isaiah cries:

Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem.

Later:

Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh.

And what was once called Forsaken is given another name:

A city not forsaken.

The change is breathtaking. Zion had said, "The LORD hath forsaken me." God answers, "You shall be called Sought out, A city not forsaken." The City is remembered. The children are returning. The Daughter is clothed.

And Psalm 149 has whispered the secret of her joy: "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King." Because the next great cry of Scripture is not merely: Your children are coming.

It is: Your King is coming.

FIVE

DAUGHTER ZION - BEHOLD, THY KING COMETH

The City Awaiting Her King

Zion cannot be separated from kingship.

Psalm 2 hears the nations raging against the LORD and against His Anointed. Heaven answers:

Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.

Psalm 2:6

The King belongs to Zion. And His inheritance reaches far beyond her walls:

Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

Psalm 48 therefore calls Zion "the city of the great King." That is why she is glorious. Without the King, she is stone. With the King, she becomes the place from which the government and righteousness of God go forth.

Then Zechariah speaks directly to the Daughter:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion... behold, thy King cometh unto thee.

Zechariah 9:9

And what sort of King comes?

Lowly, and riding upon an ass.

Humility and universal rule are placed side by side, because Zechariah immediately says that His dominion will extend from sea to sea and to the ends of the earth.

Centuries pass. Then a Man approaches Jerusalem riding on a young donkey. Matthew stops the story and tells us exactly what we are witnessing:

Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee.

Matthew 21:5

This is the first of seven explicit New Testament occurrences of Zion. And Zion appears as Daughter receiving her King.

John records the same event:

Fear not, daughter of Zion: behold, thy King cometh.

John 12:15

Daughter.
King.

Yeshua does not stumble accidentally into Zechariah's imagery. The prophecy is being enacted before the City.

Daughter Zion, behold your King.

Yet the moment is also full of sorrow. Luke tells us that when Yeshua came near and saw the City, He wept over it. The crowds shouted. The King wept.

Love for Zion does not require pretending Zion has always been faithful. The prophets who loved her rebuked her. Jeremiah wept over her. Yeshua

wept over Jerusalem. Her final hope rests not upon her perfect faithfulness - but upon God's.

Isaiah had also spoken of something being placed in Zion:

Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone.

The New Testament applies this to Messiah. Paul speaks of a Stone in Zion over whom some stumble. Peter calls Him "a chief corner stone, elect, precious." The King who comes to Zion is also the Stone God lays in Zion.

And this raises a searching question. One may admire Jerusalem and still reject Jerusalem's King. One may honour the stones of the City and stumble over the Stone God has chosen.

Biblical Zion cannot be separated from Messiah.

Romans 11 adds another title:

There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

Zion has a King. A Stone. A Deliverer. And John will eventually look and see:

A Lamb stood on the mount Zion.

The King is the Lamb. But before John shows us the Lamb upon Mount Zion, Scripture unveils one further mystery. The woman who was a Mother - the Daughter who awaited her King - will also become a Bride.

And when John is invited to see the Bride, he is shown a City.

SIX

THE BRIDE IS A CITY

The Holy Jerusalem, the Lamb's Wife

Isaiah had already spoken the language of marriage.

To the desolate woman he says:

Thy Maker is thine husband.

Then:

As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.

We often speak of the joy of the Bride. Isaiah asks us to contemplate the joy of the Bridegroom.

The language belongs to a wider biblical song of covenant love. The Song of Songs gives voice to the delight of bride and bridegroom; Isaiah takes that language and places it upon Zion, where the LORD rejoices over His restored people as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride.

God delights in her.

Her former names are removed. No longer Forsaken. No longer Desolate. She receives new names. Hephzibah: My delight is in her. Beulah: Married.

The woman is restored. The City is beloved. And the marriage imagery keeps growing.

Isaiah tells Zion to put on her beautiful garments. Revelation 19 later announces:

The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

She too is clothed. Then Revelation 21 opens upon a new heaven and a new earth. John sees:

The holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

City.
Jerusalem.
Bride.

And immediately:

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them.

Psalm 132 had declared, "Here will I dwell; for I have desired her." Now the desire has reached its fulfilment. God with His people.

But the vision becomes even more astonishing. An angel says to John:

Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

What does John see?

That great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.

John is promised the Bride.
John is shown the City.

Mother. Daughter. Wife. Bride. Jerusalem. The imagery has converged.

Then John notices the architecture. Twelve gates. Upon them the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Twelve foundations. Upon them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Long before John was shown the New Jerusalem, Psalm 48 had invited the worshipper to look carefully at Zion: "Walk about Zion... tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks." The City was to be contemplated, remembered and declared to the generation following. Now John is shown the City in its final splendour, and again the architecture speaks.

Israel has not been erased from the final City. The apostolic witness has not been erased either. The promises to the fathers and the testimony of the apostles stand together in the architecture of holy Jerusalem. And at the centre is the Lamb.

John sees no temple there. Why?

For the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

The whole City has become the dwelling place of God.

Nor does the City need created light:

The glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

Isaiah had cried, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come." Now the prophecy opens into glory. And the nations walk in that light.

The gates are never shut. Kings bring their glory into the City. Nothing defiling enters. Then Revelation takes us somewhere strangely familiar.

A river flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Beside it stands the tree of life. The leaves are for the healing of the nations. And:

There shall be no more curse.

The river has returned. The tree has returned. The presence of God has returned. The curse is gone. The Bible began in a garden. It ends in a City. But the garden has not disappeared.

The garden has become a City.

The family has become a multitude. The promise has reached the nations. The woman has become a Bride. And the Bride is the City of God.

The glory of that City is not gold. It is not pearl. It is not precious stone. Its glory is God. Its light is the Lamb. Its inhabitants belong to the Lamb. The City whose Builder and Maker is God is the Bride of the Lamb.

And after all this heavenly splendour, Hebrews makes an extraordinary statement. It does not merely say: You will one day come. It says:

Ye are come unto mount Zion.

SEVEN

YOU HAVE COME TO MOUNT ZION

The City of the Living God

Abraham looked.

That was Hebrews 11. He looked for a City. He desired a better country. God prepared a City.

Then Hebrews 12 changes the tense. First it brings us to Sinai. Fire. Darkness. Tempest. A trumpet. A voice so fearful that the hearers begged not to hear more. Even Moses trembled.

Then comes the contrast:

But ye are come unto mount Zion.

And as though one name were not enough, the writer expands it:

Unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.

Mount Zion.
The City of the Living God.
The Heavenly Jerusalem.

The City begins to fill. An innumerable company of angels. The assembly of the firstborn. Names written in heaven. God the Judge of all. The spirits of the righteous made perfect.

And then, at the heart of Zion:

Yeshua the mediator of the new covenant.

Yeshua.

The King of Zion. The Stone in Zion. The Deliverer. The Lamb. Now the Mediator of the New Covenant.

The road to Zion cannot bypass Him. We cannot have Zion without her King. We cannot have the Kingdom without the Lamb.

Hebrews also speaks of "the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." Abel's blood cried from the ground. The blood of the New Covenant speaks a better word. Mercy. Cleansing. Access. Reconciliation.

This is how those who once stood far off draw near.

But the wonder of the passage remains its tense:

Ye are come.

The City is still awaited in its fullness. Revelation still sees it descending in the consummation. Creation still groans. Yet those joined to Messiah already belong to the reality toward which Abraham looked.

The pilgrim is still walking - but he knows where home is.

Hebrews concludes:

Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved...

There is the Kingdom. Around us are kingdoms that can be moved. Governments change. Borders shift. Empires fall. Cities burn. Civilisations disappear. But Abraham had been looking for a City "which hath foundations." Revelation does not leave those foundations

undefined. When John is shown the New Jerusalem, he sees the wall of the City resting upon twelve foundations, bearing the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb; then he sees those foundations adorned with precious stones (Revelation 21:14, 19-20). Abraham looked by faith for the City with foundations; John was shown the City and described them. The hope of Hebrews opens into the vision of Revelation.

And those who come to Zion receive a Kingdom which cannot be moved.

From afar to near. From tents to foundations. From pilgrimage to home. And now perhaps we understand why Zion is capable of becoming the joy not merely of one people - but of the whole earth.

EIGHT

THE JOY OF THE WHOLE EARTH

Nations Shall Come to Thy Light

Zion is chosen.

But chosen does not mean hidden. God's choice has always moved outward toward blessing. Abraham was chosen - and through him all families of the earth were to be blessed. Israel was chosen and called at Sinai to be a kingdom of priests. That calling is not discarded in Messiah; it is renewed and enlarged within the New Covenant people. Peter speaks of a royal priesthood, and Revelation speaks of a kingdom and priests unto God. The priestly purpose first declared at Sinai reaches outward: a people drawn near to God so that His light, truth and blessing may be made known.

Psalm 48 calls her:

The joy of the whole earth.

Isaiah sees the mountain of the LORD established and declares:

All nations shall flow unto it.

They say to one another:

Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob.

Notice the name. The nations do not come because Jacob has been forgotten. They come because they want to know the God of Jacob.

And why do they come?

He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.

Then:

Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

The nations come in.
The Word goes out.

And the result is peace. Swords become ploughshares. Spears become pruning hooks. Nation ceases to learn war against nation.

Micah adds a wonderfully human picture:

They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid.

The great Kingdom vision comes down to the level of an ordinary family sitting without fear.

That is peace.

Isaiah then sees Zion shining:

Arise, shine; for thy light is come.

The light is not self-generated. It is the glory of the LORD. And:

The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

Zion does not bless the nations by ceasing to be Zion. The nations come because God's glory is upon her.

Zechariah sees peoples from many nations saying, "Let us go... to seek the LORD of hosts." Then ten men from the nations take hold of the garment of a Jew and say:

We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.

God is with you.

The attraction of Zion is the presence of God.

Isaiah speaks also of foreigners who join themselves to the LORD. They are brought to His holy mountain and made joyful in His house of prayer:

For mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.

And in the very next breath God identifies Himself as the One who gathers the outcasts of Israel and also gathers others besides them. Both movements stand together. Israel gathered. Others gathered with them. There is no need to destroy one promise to establish the other.

Romans 11 makes the same point with another image. An olive tree. Natural branches. Wild branches. Grafting. Mercy. And a warning:

Boast not against the branches.

Gentile inclusion is not permission for Gentile arrogance. The wild branch does not create the root. It partakes of it. And Paul looks forward to mercy for Israel as well, culminating again in the Deliverer associated with Zion.

Then, unable to reduce the mystery to something small, Paul worships:

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

Perhaps that is how Zion should leave us: not with a smaller vision, but with a larger one.

The Kingdom of God.

God reigning. His King upon Zion. His people restored. The nations coming. The Word going forth. War ending. The scattered gathered. The stranger welcomed. The earth filled with the knowledge of the LORD. And God dwelling with mankind.

This is why Zion cannot finally be reduced to any political programme of this age. Every human programme is too small.

Zion belongs to the Kingdom of God.

She cannot finally be contained within the ambitions, borders or political programmes of this present age. Her horizon is the reign of God, the restoration of His people, the gathering of the nations and the dwelling of God with mankind.

NINE

ZION THROUGH THE SCRIPTURES

From the Prophets to the Lamb

The name Zion sounds again and again through the Hebrew Scriptures.

For this study we use the Westminster Leningrad Codex as our Hebrew base text, in which Zion occurs 153 times.

Zion matters.

In the New Testament the Greek name Zion appears seven times. Lay the passages beside one another and something beautiful becomes visible.

Daughter of Zion... thy King cometh.
Matthew 21:5

Daughter of Zion... thy King cometh.
John 12:15

I lay in Zion a stumblingstone.
Romans 9:33

There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer.
Romans 11:26

Ye are come unto mount Zion... the city of the living God.
Hebrews 12:22

I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious.
1 Peter 2:6

A Lamb stood on the mount Zion.
Revelation 14:1

There is no need to force a hidden scheme upon these passages. Simply look at what they give us.

Daughter.
King.
Stone.
Deliverer.
City.
Cornerstone.
Lamb.

The pattern is unmistakable. Messiah stands at the centre of every New Testament use. Zion points beyond herself to her King.

Using the Westminster Leningrad Codex as our Hebrew base text, Zion occurs 153 times in the Hebrew Scriptures. John 21 records 153 great fish gathered into the net. The correspondence is striking, especially within a biblical story already rich with the themes of gathering, Kingdom and Zion.

Scripture has already shown us enough. She is the City of David. The mountain God has chosen. The place of His dwelling. The Mother whose children return. The Daughter awaiting her King. The City of the Great King. The place of the Stone. The hope of the nations. The Heavenly Jerusalem. The Bride-City of Revelation. And at the centre of all of it:

God and the Lamb.

So perhaps the simplest answer to our opening question - What does God mean by Zion? - is this: Zion is where the great purposes of God converge.

Promise. People. King. Kingdom. Dwelling. Restoration. Bride. City. Home.

Which leaves one final question. Not what Zion means, but whether Zion has begun to mean anything to us.

EPILOGUE

UNTIL ZION IS OUR LONGING



There comes a point when explanation must give way to longing.

Abraham looked for her. David sang of her. The prophets spoke to her. The exiles wept for her. The watchmen prayed for her. The children return to her. The nations come to her light. The King comes to her. The Stone is laid in her. The Deliverer is associated with her. The Lamb stands upon her. And the Bride is revealed as holy Jerusalem.

Why does the language of Zion carry so much emotion? Because there is such a thing as exile.

Psalm 137 shows the children of Judah sitting beside the rivers of Babylon. Their harps hang upon the willows. Their captors ask for a song of Zion. And the exiles answer:

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem...

Distance revealed the value of home. They remembered Zion because they knew Babylon was not where they belonged.

Perhaps this is why Scripture repeatedly calls the faithful strangers and pilgrims. Abraham knew. The exiles knew. And we need to know. The kingdoms surrounding us are not the final Kingdom.

Babylon may impress us. Rome may appear permanent. Human civilisation may build higher and travel faster and speak confidently of tomorrow. But Hebrews says:

Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

Abraham lived in tents because he knew the difference between what was temporary and what had foundations.

Do we?

Another Psalm pictures the pilgrim approaching Jerusalem:

Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.

Imagine the feeling. The road is behind him. The City is ahead. The journey has become arrival.

But Scripture will not allow our longing to stop with anything men can build. Revelation draws us further. At the centre of the final City is the throne of God and of the Lamb. A river flows. The tree of life stands there. The curse is gone. There is no night.

And then comes the promise greater than streets of gold, pearl gates or precious stones:

They shall see his face.

There is the treasure of Zion.

The glory of Zion is not Zion. The glory of Zion is God. The joy of the Kingdom is the King. The delight of the Bride is the Bridegroom. The homecoming of the children is complete because they have come home to their Father.

The Bible began in a garden. A river flowed there. The tree of life stood there. God walked with mankind. Then sin came. Man was driven out. The long journey began.

But Scripture does not end with man still outside. The river returns. The tree returns. The curse disappears. The presence of God fills everything.

And the garden has become a City.

Perhaps now we can understand Abraham. He never read Revelation. He never heard Isaiah preach. He never sang David's Psalms. He never heard Hebrews declare, "Ye are come unto mount Zion." Yet faith caused him to look beyond the horizon. He believed God had prepared something better. A country. A City. A home.

Thousands of years later John is carried to a great and high mountain - and sees the City coming down from God.

Abraham looking.
John seeing.

Between them lies the story of Scripture. And between them also lies our pilgrimage.

So may we never become so satisfied with Babylon - or with any city man builds in defiance of God - that we cease looking for Zion. May we never become so occupied with the kingdoms of men that we forget the Kingdom which cannot be moved. May we never become so fascinated with the City that we fail to behold her King. And may we never speak of Zion merely as a subject to be argued over - until we have learned to speak of her as home.

For beyond every broken city - a City with foundations. Beyond every failing kingdom - a Kingdom which cannot be moved. Beyond every exile - a homecoming. Beyond every night - a City that needs no sun. Beyond every tear - God wiping tears from every eye. Beyond the curse - the tree of life.

And at the centre of it all: God and the Lamb.

So let the watchmen keep watch. Isaiah heard the LORD say, "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem... ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." Zion is not given to us merely to admire from a distance. Scripture calls us to remember, to pray, to watch, to speak, and to long for the fulfilment of all that God has promised.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

Until the King comes. Until the City descends. Until the tabernacle of God is with men. Until His servants see His face. Until faith becomes sight. Until pilgrimage becomes home. Until Zion is no longer merely something we have read about - but somewhere we have come.

And until that day, may Zion become our longing.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

ZION

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them."

REVELATION 21:3

Until pilgrimage becomes home.

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yovelpublications.com
yovelpublications@gmail.com