

Scripture Summer School 2020

4. "Are we there yet?": Prophetic ideas of progress: TEXTS

The City in the Bible

Genesis 4:16-22

¹⁶ Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

¹⁷ Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and named it Enoch after his son Enoch. ¹⁸ To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael the father of Methushael, and Methushael the father of Lamech. ¹⁹ Lamech took two wives; the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. ²⁰ Adah bore Jabal; he was the ancestor of those who live in tents and have livestock. ²¹ His brother's name was Jubal; he was the ancestor of all those who play the lyre and pipe. ²² Zillah bore Tubal-cain, who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

Genesis 11:1-9 The Babel Builders

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ² And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." ⁵ The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. ⁶ And the LORD said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." ⁸ So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹ Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

Jerusalem Psalms

Psalm 46

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth
should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the
sea;

³ though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city
of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.

⁵ God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be
moved;

God will help it when the morning dawns.

⁶ The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms
totter;

he utters his voice, the earth melts.

⁷ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

⁸ Come, behold the works of the LORD;
see what desolations he has brought on the
earth.

⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.

¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth."

¹¹ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Psalm 87

On the holy mount stands the city he founded;

² the LORD loves the gates of Zion
more than all the dwellings of Jacob.

³ Glorious things are spoken of you,
O city of God. *Selah*

⁴ Among those who know me I mention Rahab and
Babylon;

Philistia too, and Tyre, with Ethiopia —
"This one was born there," they say.

⁵ And of Zion it shall be said,
"This one and that one were born in it";
for the Most High himself will establish it.

⁶ The LORD records, as he registers the peoples,
"This one was born there."

⁷ Singers and dancers alike say,
“All my springs are in you.”

Psalm 122

I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD!”
² Our feet are standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem.
³ Jerusalem—built as a city
that is bound firmly together.
⁴ To it the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.
⁵ For there the thrones for judgment were set up,
the thrones of the house of David.
⁶ Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
“May they prosper who love you.
⁷ Peace be within your walls,
and security within your towers.”
⁸ For the sake of my relatives and friends

Prophecy against Jerusalem

Isaiah 1:21-31

How the faithful city
has become a whore!
She that was full of justice,
righteousness lodged in her—
but now murderers!
²² Your silver has become dross,
your wine is mixed with water.
²³ Your princes are rebels
and companions of thieves.
Everyone loves a bribe
and runs after gifts.
They do not defend the orphan,
and the widow’s cause does not come before
them.
²⁴ Therefore says the Sovereign, the LORD of hosts,
the Mighty One of Israel:
Ah, I will pour out my wrath on my enemies,
and avenge myself on my foes!
²⁵ I will turn my hand against you;
I will smelt away your dross as with lye
and remove all your alloy.
²⁶ And I will restore your judges as at the first,
and your counselors as at the beginning.
Afterward you shall be called the city of
righteousness,
the faithful city.

I will say, “Peace be within you.”

⁹ For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek your good.

Psalm 125

Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be moved, but abides forever.
² As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
so the LORD surrounds his people,
from this time on and forevermore.
³ For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest
on the land allotted to the righteous,
so that the righteous might not stretch out
their hands to do wrong.
⁴ Do good, O LORD, to those who are good,
and to those who are upright in their hearts.
⁵ But those who turn aside to their own crooked
ways
the LORD will lead away with evildoers.
Peace be upon Israel!

²⁷ Zion shall be redeemed by justice,
and those in her who repent, by righteousness.
²⁸ But rebels and sinners shall be destroyed
together,
and those who forsake the LORD shall be
consumed.
²⁹ For you shall be ashamed of the oaks
in which you delighted;
and you shall blush for the gardens
that you have chosen.
³⁰ For you shall be like an oak
whose leaf withers,
and like a garden without water.
³¹ The strong shall become like tinder,
and their work like a spark;
they and their work shall burn together,
with no one to quench them.

Prophecies about the restoration of Jerusalem

Isaiah 54:1-14

Sing, O barren one who did not bear;
burst into song and shout,
you who have not been in labor!
For the children of the desolate woman will be
more
than the children of her that is married, says the
LORD.
² Enlarge the site of your tent,

and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out;
do not hold back; lengthen your cords
and strengthen your stakes.
³ For you will spread out to the right and to the left,
and your descendants will possess the nations
and will settle the desolate towns.
⁴ Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed;
do not be discouraged, for you will not suffer disgrace;
for you will forget the shame of your youth,
and the disgrace of your widowhood you will remember no more.
⁵ For your Maker is your husband,
the LORD of hosts is his name;
the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,
the God of the whole earth he is called.
⁶ For the LORD has called you
like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit,
like the wife of a man's youth when she is cast off,
says your God.
⁷ For a brief moment I abandoned you,
but with great compassion I will gather you.
⁸ In overflowing wrath for a moment
I hid my face from you,
but with everlasting love I will have compassion

on you,
says the LORD, your Redeemer.
⁹ This is like the days of Noah to me:
Just as I swore that the waters of Noah
would never again go over the earth,
so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you
and will not rebuke you.
¹⁰ For the mountains may depart
and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,
says the LORD, who has compassion on you.
¹¹ O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted,
I am about to set your stones in antimony,
and lay your foundations with sapphires.
¹² I will make your pinnacles of rubies,
your gates of jewels,
and all your wall of precious stones.
¹³ All your children shall be taught by the LORD,
and great shall be the prosperity of your children.
¹⁴ In righteousness you shall be established;
you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear;
and from terror, for it shall not come near you

Zechariah 8

The word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying: ² Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath. ³ Thus says the LORD: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts shall be called the holy mountain. ⁴ Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. ⁵ And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. ⁶ Thus says the LORD of hosts: Even though it seems impossible to the remnant of this people in these days, should it also seem impossible to me, says the LORD of hosts? ⁷ Thus says the LORD of hosts: I will save my people from the east country and from the west country; ⁸ and I will bring them to live in Jerusalem. They shall be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.
⁹ Thus says the LORD of hosts: Let your hands be strong—you that have recently been hearing these words from the mouths of the prophets who were present when the foundation was laid for the rebuilding of the temple, the house of the LORD of hosts. ¹⁰ For before those days there were no wages for people or for animals, nor was there any safety from the foe for those who went out or came in, and I set them all against one another. ¹¹ But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, says the LORD of hosts. ¹² For there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, and the skies shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.
¹³ Just as you have been a cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you and you shall be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong.
¹⁴ For thus says the LORD of hosts: Just as I purposed to bring disaster upon you, when your ancestors provoked me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the LORD of hosts, ¹⁵ so again I have purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; do not be afraid. ¹⁶ These are the things that you shall

do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace, ¹⁷ do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, says the LORD.

¹⁸ The word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying: ¹⁹ Thus says the LORD of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be seasons of joy and gladness, and cheerful festivals for the house of Judah: therefore love truth and peace.

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

What kind of Messiah?

Matthew 26:37-46

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him." ⁴⁹ At once he came up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. ⁵¹ Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁵² Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?" ⁵⁵ At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. ⁵⁶ But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

The New Jerusalem

Revelation 21

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

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away."

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. ⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

⁹ Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." ¹⁰ And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It has the

glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites; ¹³ on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. ¹⁴ And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

¹⁵ The angel who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. ¹⁶ The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width; and he measured the city with his rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. ¹⁷ He also measured its wall, one hundred forty-four cubits by human measurement, which the angel was using. ¹⁸ The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass. ¹⁹ The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, ²⁰ the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. ²¹ And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass.

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

The Garden is Taken up into the City

Genesis 2

¹⁰ A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. ¹¹ The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; ¹² and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. ¹³ The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

Ezekiel 47:1-12

47 Then he brought me back to the entrance of the temple; there, water was flowing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east); and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. ² Then he brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and the water was coming out on the south side.

³ Going on eastward with a cord in his hand, the man measured one thousand cubits, and then led me through the water; and it was ankle-deep. ⁴ Again he measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was knee-deep. Again he measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was up to the waist. ⁵ Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross, for the water had risen; it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be crossed. ⁶ He said to me, "Mortal, have you seen this?"

Then he led me back along the bank of the river. ⁷ As I came back, I saw on the bank of the river a great many trees on the one side and on the other. ⁸ He said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh. ⁹ Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live where the river goes. ¹⁰ People will stand fishing beside the sea from En-gedi to En-eglaim; it will be a place for the spreading of nets; its fish will be of a great many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea. ¹¹ But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt. ¹² On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing."

Revelation 22:1-5

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants¹ will worship him; ⁴they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Questions to think about:

1. How does God's kingdom come on earth?
2. Do I tend more toward the apocalyptic or the prophetic in my thinking? Might there be a 'third way'?

One interesting response to engage with:

“Not that I believe in progress. I do not see things getting better. Some things do get better; more, it seems, get worse. I merely report these flickers of light in the darkness so that we are clear that the darkness has not and cannot overcome them. We are not part of a movement that is inexorably bringing in a better society. We only have these occasional moments of grace and must trust the final outcome. Not that God intervenes only occasionally – God is the constant pressure for transformation in every situation. But God needs our response. These moments of grace, then, are epiphanies of the true meaning of the universe, theophanies that manifest God in the burning bushes of human affairs.”

(Walter Wink, “Standing on the Rock of the impossible,” *Church and Society* (1995): 3-9, 9.)