

A Biblical Theology of City

What is “biblical theology”?

- looking at theological concepts as a story
- comparing Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology
- ‘along the grain’ versus ‘across the grain’ theology

The idea of “city” in Bible

- not simply a geographical marker, but the goal of redemption

Revelation 21:2

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

What’s so special about a city?

- modern cities are defined by population size, but ancient cities were defined by population density
- why? because all ancient cities were enclosed by walls

Cities were places of safety and stability

- allowed for systems of law and order (versus law of sword)

Numbers 35:12

The cities shall be for you a refuge from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he stands before the congregation for judgment.

Cities were places of diversity

- the security of cities made them welcoming to minority groups
- rich cultural and ethnic diversity unlike in villages

Acts 13:1

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Cities were places of greater productivity and creativity

- cities allowed for exchange of ideas, collaboration, specialization
- cities are where culture-making happens

Genesis 4:17, 20-22

¹⁷ Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. ²⁰ Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. ²¹ His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. ²² Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron.

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Mandate to build a city	City of Man (rebellion/pride)	The promise of the City of God	New Jerusalem (the City of God)
Eden	Fall	Redemption	New Creation

Therefore, building a city was God’s mandate for humanity

Genesis 1:27-28

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

This was a commission to build a city!

- Adam and Eve were to transform Garden of Eden into the City of God
- but Adam rebelled against God and a different kind of city emerged

The City of Man: a city of rebellion and self-glory

Genesis 4

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. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. ¹⁸ To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. ²³ Lamech said to his wives: “Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. ²⁴ If Cain’s revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech’s is seventy-sevenfold.”

Genesis 11:4

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, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”

Revelation 14:8

Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.

Revelation 17:5

Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.

The City of God: a city of grace and holiness

Hebrews 11:10

For Abraham was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Psalms 107:4-9

⁴ Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in; ⁵ hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. ⁶ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. ⁷ He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in. ⁸ Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men! ⁹ For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

Deuteronomy 12:5

But you shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there.

1 Kings 14:21

Jerusalem, the city that the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there.

Isaiah 1:26

You shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.

How the story ends: New Jerusalem, the heavenly City of God

Revelation 21

² And I saw the holy city, 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, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

Revelation 22

¹ 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 ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

How shall we then live?

- we are citizens of City of God but resident aliens of City of Man

Jeremiah 29:4-7

⁴ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶ Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. ⁷ But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Notes