



Psalm 122

"Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem" Psalm 122:6

We have celebrated Easter Sunday for another year – and we have celebrated that our Lord is alive and He's alive for evermore. He has conquered sin and all creation has been put under His feet. Through His death and resurrection, all men are able by personal faith in Jesus, can become God's people and are inheritors of all God's promises.

But what of Israel? I've encountered several prayer groups, both nationally here and internationally to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, quoting of course Psalm 122 verse 6. I must say that they tend to fall into two camps – pro-Israel that ask us to pray that Jerusalem will be at peace under the control of the Israeli people, and broader groups that ask us to pray that there may be peace in that land between Jews and Arabs. Even this week we see no peace even as we celebrate the resurrection of the Prince of Peace.

Psalm 122 was a psalm that celebrates Jerusalem. It celebrates the place that God chose to establish the Temple and as the psalmist says, it's the appointed place for the people to worship (verse 1,4) and it's the appointed place for justice (verse 5). We don't know when it was written but it is one of 35 psalms of ascent which were written for pilgrims going to Jerusalem for Passover and the like and were sung particularly whilst they climbed up the Temple Mount, hence psalms of ascent.

We don't know when this psalm dates from but as you can see from the Good News translation, they have made it a post-exile psalm – probably after Nehemiah's rebuilding of the city. The way they've translated it suggests that the psalmist is asking his singers to celebrate the newly restored city and encouraging them to pray for its continued prosperity. It's quite important that we know when it was written because we need to know how prophetic it is for now.

What we do know about Jerusalem in relation to the people of Israel is that its fortunes were directly related to their obedience as a nation to God. And in 586 BC the temple was totally destroyed for the first time because of the disobedience of the nation despite many, many warnings from their long-suffering God.

As we know, the temple was restored after the edict of Cyrus the Great in 538 BC and about the mid 400s BC before Jerusalem started to grow and prosper under faithful people. It was these people who most enthusiastically prayed the psalms of ascents because they appreciated so much the grace of God in allowing the temple to be rebuilt.

Did Jesus pray for the peace of Jerusalem? Not by the sound of this: *Matt 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. 38 Look, your house is left to you desolate. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" 24:1 Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 2 "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.*

Instead He prophesied the destruction of the Temple and the city. Why? Even in His day, Judaism was again a shadow of its former self. Jewish sects had become legalistic and existed for their own ends rather than God's and of course here was Jesus, God's Son, who came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. Their leaders said "we will not have this man to reign over us" and "His blood be on us and on our children". Ouch! Not wise.

There was no prayer for peace by Jesus for Jerusalem – only prophecy. And in AD70 the Romans totally

destroyed the temple and later in 135 BC they raised the whole city to the ground, not leaving one stone on another, as Jesus prophesied.

So do we pray for the peace of Jerusalem now? We certainly pray for peace in that land, that warring will cease, that the Jewish nation may know Christ as Saviour and Lord, and own Him as their King. We will pray for the Palestinians that they will turn from their false religion of Islam and turn to Christ. Palestinians might add have a great Christian heritage but most of them fled to the Lebanon and America over the years.

Should we support Israel at all costs? Many groups here and in America say we should. After all God has restored their nation as prophesied in His word. Just because they have nationhood again does not mean that they are blessed – just that in His wisdom and grace God's purposes for them are being worked out. Look at their Government, does it own Jesus as Saviour, does it act with the mercy and justice God's word requires, particularly those who are not of the household of Israel? Definitely not. Is the Lord worshipped in His temple? No because it isn't there and the government of the land is predominately secular.

But we should pray for Israel. We pray for that nation's salvation – it needs it. It needs Jesus. And when will that truly come. Only when He returns. The Jerusalem of Psalm 122 was one where God was worshipped in His temple, a city where where justice was truly meted out. That isn't the Israel and Jerusalem of today. As we saw, it's a divided city, a divided country; one where there is little peace between its inhabitants. When Christ returns, He will be worshipped in His temple, all nations will be drawn to Jerusalem and to Him and the city and land will prosper. Until then, the country will be run by evil men and the nation will remain surrounded by enemies. And only the people of God – the ones He has called in Christ are there to stand in the breach and intercede for them.

Yet 2000 years the wall of partition was broken down between the Jews and the Gentiles. From the day Jesus rose again until now, there has been only one name by which men can be saved – Jesus. So pray for the peace of Jerusalem but particularly for the salvation of the Jews and the Gentiles in that land because the only way of peace is Christ.

But finally, there is another prayer for Jerusalem. The only time when Jerusalem is ever going to be in peace again and the vision of Psalm 122 be truly complete is when Jesus returns. Therefore as we pray for the peace of Jerusalem we pray "even so, come Lord Jesus!"

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