

# The Peace of Jerusalem

*Reading the Psalms in the light of Nehemiah and the NT*

Psalm 122:1 *A Song of Ascents. Of David.*

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!"

<sup>2</sup> **Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!**

<sup>3</sup> Jerusalem-- built as a city that is bound firmly together,

<sup>4</sup> to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD.

<sup>5</sup> There **thrones for judgment** were set, the thrones of the house of David.

<sup>6</sup> **Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!** "May they be secure who love you!"

<sup>7</sup> **Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!"**

<sup>8</sup> For my brothers and companions' sake I will say, "Peace be within you!"

Neh 2:10 But when **Sanballat** the Horonite and **Tobiah** the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

<sup>11</sup> **So I went to Jerusalem** and was there three days.

<sup>12</sup> Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And **I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem.** There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode.

<sup>13</sup> I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire.

<sup>14</sup> Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass.

<sup>15</sup> Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall,

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

Psalm 123:1 *A Song of Ascents.*

To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!

<sup>2</sup> Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he has mercy upon us.

<sup>3</sup> **Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us, for**

and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned.

<sup>16</sup> And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the **Jews**, the **priests**, the **nobles**, the **officials**, and the rest **who were to do the work**.

<sup>17</sup> Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. **Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.**"

<sup>18</sup> And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work.

Neh 2:19 But when **Sanballat** the Horonite and **Tobiah** the Ammonite servant and **Geshem** the Arab heard of it, **they jeered at us and despised us** and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"

<sup>20</sup> Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem."

we have had more than enough of contempt.

<sup>4</sup> Our soul has had more than enough of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.

**Neh 4:1** Now when **Sanballat** heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and **he jeered at the Jews.**

<sup>2</sup> And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?"

<sup>3</sup> **Tobiah** the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Yes, what they are building-- if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!"

<sup>4</sup> **Hear, O our God, for we are despised.** Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives.

<sup>5</sup> Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.

<sup>6</sup> **So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.**

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## PSALM 122-123; NEHEMIAH 2:10, 2:19-20 and 4:1-6

## There Must be Some Misunderstanding

REBUILDING THE WALLS. This is what the book of Nehemiah is all about. Unfortunately, preachers often go astray at this, its most basic point, in their interpretation and application of Scripture. I've heard this taught—on several occasions—by well-meaning ministers, usually interim pastors or men who have only recently taken a new position, who are coming into a bad situation where either the previous pastor was fired, or the congregation has dwindled to almost nothing. The first inevitable “turn to \_\_\_\_\_” statement he makes in his new role is Nehemiah.

I guess it's good that he wants to preach from the Old Testament. Many know those who even try this are few and far between these days. But what will he do with it? Maybe you've heard it yourself: “Nehemiah heard that the walls of Jerusalem were in a state of disrepair. So, he confessed his sin and the sins of the people, hopped on a camel to Jerusalem, and began rebuilding them. We, church, are in a state of disrepair. Let us confess our sins and begin rebuilding the walls of this church. Now, let's turn to Nehemiah to see the steps we can take to do this.” The entire book thus becomes

a modern-day Church-growth manual, complete with divinely inspired phases we can follow in order to make our church a megachurch. And, of course, this ends up looking nothing like what Nehemiah actually did.

This kind of pragmatic approach to the Holy Scripture is perhaps today's most popular way of reading and applying the Sacred Text. Sadly, this is not primarily why God gave us Nehemiah or his testimonies or his book that contains them.

Besides Nehemiah, Psalm 122 is also about the walls of Jerusalem. But this same Psalm also contains the well-known phrase, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” Sadly, this statement has also been badly interpreted and applied by many in our day. This one is popular in many Dispensational circles. For example, the TV preacher John Hagee says in a sermon back in 2015,

There are two points that have been made today which we are literally living right now. The Bible says to remember Jerusalem. David writes in the hundred and twenty-second Psalm, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, for they shall prosper who loved you.” Why? Because from Genesis to

Revelation, Israel is God's time clock. It's the stopwatch of heaven. It's God's day timer.

When I was an eight-year-old boy sitting at a kitchen table in my home listening to the radio and the UN announced the birth of Israel, my father, who is a great Bible scholar, said, "This is the greatest day in the 20th century. It is living proof that Messiah is on his way, that God's word is absolutely true. For every OT prophet has said this day was going to come. But we have lived to see it." And then he said, "The next thing that will happen is that Jerusalem will be reunited to the state of Israel." That happened in 1967. And he said, "That following that, the day of the Gentile is over. The focus of God is on Israel."

Israel is going to vote in just a few days [not sure on what]. This is one of the most serious critical votes in the history of the world [which makes my not being sure pretty ironic]. I want us to pray for the Peace of Jerusalem and leave it in God's hands. But, this is going to affect every person who lives on the planet, because when there's war in Jerusalem, there's war in the world. And this war, once it starts, is going to sweep the world.

The king of Jordan said the other day, “The third world war has already started. He’s right. He is right. And Jerusalem, it is the time peace. Let’s pray for Jerusalem.”<sup>1</sup>

He then proceeds to pray for the “**Righteous**” (Jews?) who are bring surrounded by all their enemies. Then he “**releases**” God to act through his prayer, fulfilling his responsibility to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, yet asking that God’s will be done.

Is this what it means to pray for the peace of Jerusalem? Is it some kind of an eschatological key to stave off WWIII (which these days always must of course be Armageddon) in a way that seems quite self-centered and human-empowering, because if we don’t, it will affect us? Is that what Psalm 122 is teaching?

## **Nehemiah and the Psalms of Ascent**

As we saw last week, there is a probable fascinating link between the book of Nehemiah and the **Psalms 120-134**, the

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<sup>1</sup> **John Hagee**, “Pastor Hagee Prays for the Peace of Israel,” *Hagee Ministries* (Mar 16, 2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QW4Il-o1OGM>.

so-called **Psalms of Ascent**. The idea is that they were both fashioned by the editor(s) of those books to complement one another so that they could, at least in part, be easily used as part of the official liturgy of the post-exilic Feast of Tabernacles, one of the three mandatory pilgrimage feasts that all Jews were commanded to take to Jerusalem. Of course, God had plans beyond this that both could be used for us millennia after this.

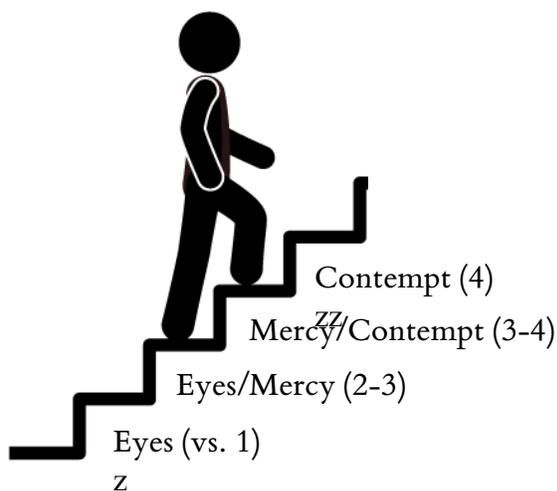
But returning to their time for a moment, perhaps the first of these newly reformed worship gatherings would have included Nehemiah and Ezra themselves, the post-exilic governor and priest of Israel respectively. At some point, **Nehemiah would have stood up** on the first evening of the first day of the feast and given his first testimony of what God had done for himself and Israel. This would correspond to then singing together from Psalm 120. The next morning, he would give his second testimony and they would sing Psalm 121. That evening, the third, and so on.

Today, we will be looking at **the third and fourth testimonies** and their corresponding songs: Psalms 122-123. I want to look at them from the perspective of trying to understand them as NT Christians, so that we don't make

the mistakes mentioned earlier, and so that we can hear the biblical application which God thinks is so obviously important to our lives today.

## *Ps 123 & Nehemiah's 4th Testimony (Neh 2:19-20; 4:1-6)*

Since there is no controversy here, let's begin with **Psalm 123**. It is very short, just **four verses**. Like Psalm 121, it is built like a stair-step (**appropriate for a song of "ascent"**), with repeating words in each new verse.



Vv. 1-2 have the word “**eyes**.” 2-3 have the word “**mercy**.” 3-4 have the idea of “**contempt**”.

The song begins like Psalm 121, “**I lift up my eyes**.” Again, this is an idea appropriate for going “**up**.” In this case,

where are the eyes lifted? Previously, it was to the mountains (Ps 121:1). Now, it is beyond them. “To you ... You who are enthroned in the heavens” (Ps 123:1). This move from earthly mountains to heaven foreshadows much we will say today.

The whole point of Mt. Zion is that this is what it was supposed to do, for it is never meant as an end to itself. This is the opposite of the way someone like Hagee thinks, where Zion is treated like the full reality. But Mt. Zion is only **a type**. True, it really was where God resided between the cherubim in the OT, but its purpose was to point to something beyond itself. And by the time of the NT, that something else had appeared before all men.

Prior to the destruction of the temple and the exile, the Jews trusted in the type rather than the thing it looked forward to when they said, “The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!” (Jer 7:4). The Psalmist has learned his lesson. Thus, he fixes his eyes upon the one enthroned in the heavens. Even though he can't see him, because he is invisible, he looks this way with **the eyes of faith**, for he knows that his God is the greatest, truest reality.

The second verse reinforces all this. “Behold, as the eyes of the servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he has mercy upon us” (2). Hear the difference between a servant and master! It is an analogy of the difference between the creation and the Creator. The servant does not look to the maidservant or the mistress, but to the LORD.

Here, God is called “Yahweh our Elohim.” Yahweh belonged to Israel and Israel to Yahweh, because long ago, the LORD took Israel to be his treasured possession. This is an affirmation that the nation will not have any other gods before Yahweh. It has a parallel in the NT, a parallel that deals with the **type-antitype** of Israel and the church. The Apostle says, “For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is one God...” (1Co 8:5-6a). He “happens” to be the Father and Son, Creator of the Universe, the One True God (7). But the “**For us there is one God**” is nearly identical to Yahweh our Elohim (the LORD our God). Because in Christ, God has taken the church to be

his treasured possession, a church which he calls “The Israel of God” (**Gal 6:16**).

This makes the song directly relevant to us, even though we are not physical Israel. The reason cited here is only one among many. But that reason is “**mercy**.” Now you see why he can only look here. Only God can give mercy. And, he is praying for the entire nation; mercy is needed upon “us.” How much more can only the LORD give this?

But why do they need mercy? As we’ve seen, mercy becomes the theme of the next verse. “**Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt**” (3).

**What is contempt?** The last verse, which repeats this word, identifies it with the word “**scorn**.” Our soul has had more than enough of “**scorn ... and contempt...**” These are harsh, brutal words of mocking, jeering, and ridicule. The old saying is, “**Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.**” Physically, that’s true. But such words are like drips of water in a Chinese form of torture. At first they are annoying. Then, tiresome. Soon, they are hard to endure. If not handled properly, they can soon consume a person with hatred.

When was **the last time you were teased or taunted**? Maybe it's been a long time? But try to remember. Certainly, anyone not homeschooled can think back to those years of jeering and sneering. In one way or another, I bet many here have some scars they don't want to show from those days. Adults participate in the same stuff, they're just usually more clever about it. Or sometimes, not.

It is at this point that we see **the direct correspondence with Nehemiah's** fourth testimony. This occurs in two places (**Neh 2:19-20** and **4:1-6**), with a whole chapter full of names of builders and the things they were building in between. Nehemiah's enemies: **Sanballat** the Horonite, **Tobiah** the Ammonite, and **Geshem** the Arab heard what Nehemiah was doing and **"they jeered at us and despised us"** (**2:19**). This is much worse than anything that happens on a school playground. Sanballat heard that they were building the wall and he was angry and began to jeer at the Jews (**4:1**). But it was more than this. He was doing it publicly, to **garner public support**. Thus, he adds, **"What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"** (**2:19**).

It continues as they say more in the presence of their own army of Samaria. In other words, this is **military intimidation**. “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?” (4:2). Now, it sounds like not only the Jews, but their God is the subject of attack. The Ammonite Tobiah adds, “Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!” (3). And, so the attempt to taunt them into quitting them becomes part of the attack.

It is important to understand that these are **not enemies from far away Babylon**. Rather, as we saw last time, these enemies were the surrounding nations of Israel. They knew full well what power the temple and city held over these people. More than that, they did not want it being protected by newly fortified walls. Who knows if they might return to the ways of Moses and Joshua and start conquering them again, perhaps even with the help of the kings of the east!

In other words, these are not just taunts, but they are deliberate attempts to **sabotage** the people and plans of God (Nehemiah said this is what God had put into his heart). This

comes from men who are “at ease” and “proud” (4) in their current condition, where Israel is no longer an enemy. Things are going well for these aliens living in Israel. The people need God’s mercy, or this thing will never succeed.

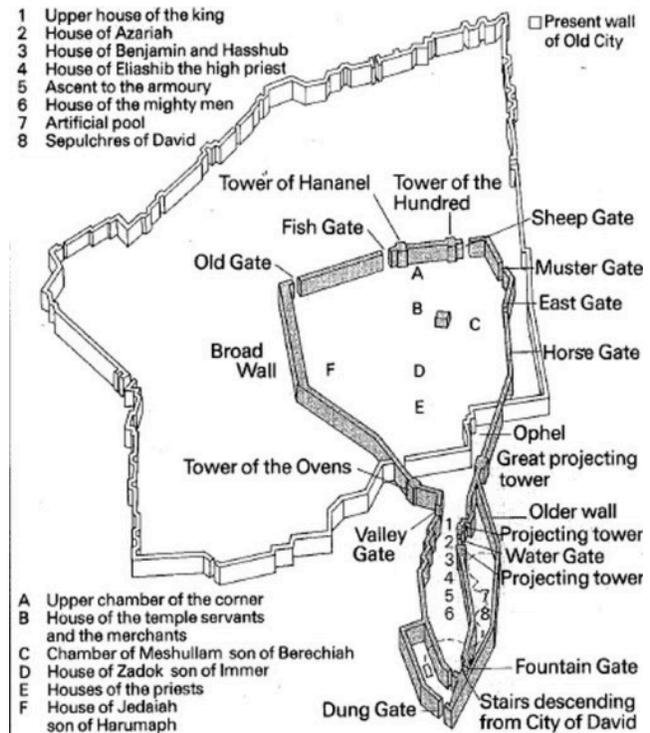
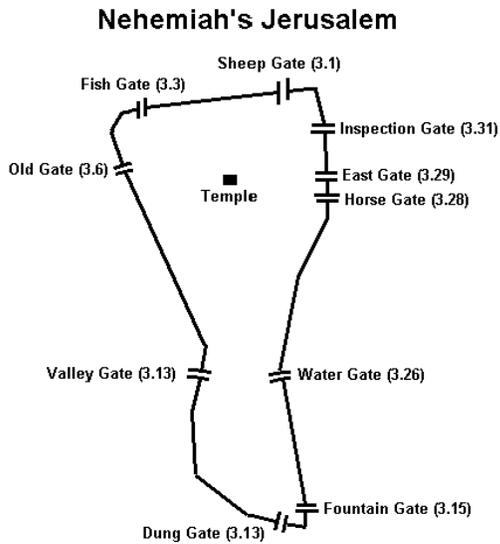
Just like the Psalm is a prayer, so also Nehemiah ends this testimony with a prayer. “Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders” (4:4-5).

This language is steeped in Moses. This imprecation is for justice. Justice for men who hate and despise God and want nothing to do with him or his temple or his city or his people. Those who do not understand the attributes of God and that he is holy and just can only shake their head in disbelief that someone would pray such a thing. But these people are attacking God himself, and thus there is nothing more right to pray. The section finishes with them building the wall (6) as God gave them all a mind to work. In this way, he gave them mercy. Now let’s try to understand how this might inform our thinking of Psalm 122.

## *Ps 122 and Nehemiah's 3rd Testimony (Neh 2:10-18)*

What lead to this state of affairs with the enemies of Nehemiah mocking the people so? This is where **his third testimony** can teach us. This one begins in **Neh 2:10ff.** Sanballat and Tobiah heard that someone was coming to “**seek the welfare of the people of Israel**” (10). This alone ought to tell you about their hearts. Can you imagine being so hardened, so full of hatred for a group of people that when someone simply comes to seek their welfare, that is to give them aid, that you become greatly displeased? This is the definition of **racism**.

At any rate, Nehemiah goes up to Jerusalem. For three days (11) he arises in the night and with a very few men and only his own animal (12). They were there on a secret **surveillance mission**. He begins at the **Valley Gate**, then the **Dragon Spring**, then the **Dung Gate**. He inspects all the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down or destroyed by fire (13). Three full nights walking around the walls, inspecting. This was going to be a large undertaking.



He then comes to the **Fountain Gate** and the **King's Pool**, but he was unable to pass with he and his animal (14). It was that badly ruined. He then turns out to the valley to inspect the wall and comes back in via the **Valley Gate** (15). The whole purpose was to be secretive so that no one would yet know “**what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem**” (12). The officials did not know where he had gone or what he was going, and he hadn't even told the Jews, priests, nobles, officials, or any who would be doing the labor (16).

Not unlike someone who would come much later, **after three days**, the rebuilding would begin. “**I said to them, ‘You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision’**” (17). This was the confirmation everyone needed. Someone had come from far away with the authority of the king and of God. The words he had spoken from the king were true (18). They were strengthened and rose to build the wall (18).

It is into this that I want us to consider Psalm 122. This song of ascents is the first “**of David.**” Its original context was sometime in his lifetime, not Nehemiah’s. Both end up pointing to something beyond themselves. We’ve hinted at this in the three days and then rebuilding with Nehemiah. But David is the king of Israel and he never represents only himself. There is **a greater king** coming from his line.

“**I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD’**” (1). David, of course, wanted to build this house. But the temple didn’t exist yet. So perhaps he was thinking of the tabernacle. Nehemiah would have thought the temple. Obviously, this shows that there were different “houses” of the LORD in the OT. **What do you and I think**

about when we think of the house of the LORD? Here we have to understand **typology** yet again.

The NT teaches us two things about this. One, **Jesus is the temple**, the house of God. And it sounds a lot like Nehemiah. “**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up**” (**John 2:19**). Thus, when we go up to the house of the LORD, we come to the resurrected temple of Christ himself—the Greater Temple. Or, in Psalm 123’s language, we lift up our eyes to the one enthroned in the heavens!

Second, **the church is the temple** of God in the NT. “**You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ**” (**1Pe 2:5**). This is very important, for we have already seen that the church is the NT’s “Israel of God,” and that we as Christians have a right to sing these songs for ourselves.

Again, where is the presence of God on earth now? It is where the Holy Spirit dwells, just like in the OT. But where does he dwell? Not in a city. Not in a temple built by hands, but in his people. “**Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?**” (**1Co 3:16**). This is one of the most common ideas of the NT, beginning

with Pentecost. It is also where God's people gather together for worship. And where does that have to be? Wherever they choose, in any land, any nation, any building. Because they are holy by the Spirit, they make the places holy. When you sing Ps 122:1, you are not to be thinking of going to Israel to a rebuilt third temple, but gathering together to worship the Lord in the Name of Jesus Christ.

But while Nehemiah and the people were worshiping Christ, they were still living in the shadows of OT types. "Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!" (2). This is what they had to do, because in the territorial way of OT religion, you had to be where God dwelt in his temple and this was in Jerusalem, not in Athens or Rome or London or Cairo. Therefore, to dwell within the gates of Jerusalem was to stand near the very presence of God on earth.

A gate is a thing that moves you outside to the inside. It is a large, protected door. What is the counterpart in the NT? "He who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice ... and follow him ... I am the door of the sheep" (John 10:3-4, 7).

The Psalm continues, “Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together” (3). Again, for Nehemiah and David, while at various stages of development, they literally meant Jerusalem. This was God’s holy city. And as the next verse says, “To which the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the Name of the LORD” (4).

This is a main reason this is a song of ascents. The tribes of Israel in David’s day went up to Jerusalem. Why “up?” It’s like going “up” to Aspen or Vail. They are literally in the mountains and are therefore up. Same with Jerusalem. Nehemiah is also going up, from Babylon. And when he reaches it, he heart begins to praise God for his mercy toward him and his people who are being reestablished in the land.

But again, what is Jerusalem in the NT? It is called “Jerusalem above” (Gal 4:26). It is called “the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb 12:22). It is called “the new Jerusalem which comes down” (Rev 3:12, 21:2). It isn’t that the NT ignores the reality of that city “across the pond” as they say. No. The first great council was there (Acts 15:2ff.). Paul has the churches send money to the church established in it (1Co

16:3). But, its *theology* is that “the present Jerusalem” corresponds to Hagar and Mt. Sinai, and she is therefore a slave under the law, a slave that needs to be set free (Gal 4:25). There is a greater Jerusalem, that the earthly city points to.

The song continues, “There thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David” (Ps 122:5). This refers to God’s setting the king on his holy hill (Ps 2:6). From here, he would dispense justice to the people. This is a Davidic-Kingly psalm. “Thrones” seems symbolic of the 12 tribes who would accept the judgment of the king.

Yet again, what happens to thrones in the NT? Jesus tells his disciples, “You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you ... a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:28). Is this an earthly rule? No. Eleven of the twelve Apostles died horrible deaths, and the 12<sup>th</sup> (John) was boiled in oil, but survived. None of them ruled like David.

In Revelation, this becomes 24 thrones around throne of heaven (Rev 4:4). Twenty-four is a representative number (12 Tribes of Israel + 12 Apostles = OT and NT, one

church). This refers to a present spiritual and future physical reality, and it includes Christ's church. "Do you not know that you will judge angels?" (1Co 6:3) as we sit on thrones making right judgments in the world to come. This is the very definition of being an image-bearer in Genesis 1. It is what it means to have full dominion.

As you can see, this song is replete with imagery that the NT transfers from type to antitype, from shadow to substance, from acorn to oak tree. In none of this is the type or shadow or acorn unreal. Nowhere is the historical reality or the amazing things God did through or in them denied. But those things were temporary or conditional, and they were signs that pointed to greater realities than themselves.

This is the first and greatest lesson you can learn from the Psalms or Nehemiah. It is [the redemptive-historic lesson](#). It is the reason Jesus came lesson. If you skip it, you can badly misunderstand and apply. Worst case, it can create great anxiety towards a future you can know little about. But even lesser cases, it can end up making the text all about you. And God wants more for you than that. Your hope and happiness are, from start to finish, in Christ and Christ alone.

Thus, we come to the first of our misapplied verses. “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!” (Ps 122:6). Of course, for David and Nehemiah, they really did mean the place called Jerusalem. But we’ve seen why this was. This is where God had chosen to set his Name. **The misapplication of this verse** sees only the physical reality today, as it reads newspaper headlines as fulfillment of Scripture instead of the NT. It fails to grasp the NT teaching on this. (In fact, sometimes it even mocks this reality through phrases like “replacement theology,” which is a Dispensational curse-word for Reformed theology).

Yet, the NT teaching is right here in this very verse. The verse does not stop here. “May they be secure who love you!” (6b). It isn’t a blanket statement about a city, whether that city is righteous or wicked, as if this is a form of modern Zionism where the State of Israel and Christ hating Jews can do nothing wrong ever. It is a statement about those in Jerusalem who loved the LORD. In fact, this excluded the wicked in Jerusalem, even as it excluded Nehemiah’s three enemies whom he prayed against.

Our second verse comes right after it. “Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!” (7). The same

theme of “peace” is found in both verses. This is but an extension of the other. The walls and towers are the things that guarded the main city. These did not refer to allegorical walls like “sin in your life,” which became barriers to God’s indwelling presence or something. For Nehemiah, they were literal walls in a physical city and they protected what was inside of it, namely, the temple. Those are what Nehemiah was repairing.

But why? Why was he rebuilding them, and is there a NT counterpart to these walls? First, the why question. What Nehemiah was doing was really completing the necessary job started by Ezra in rebuilding the temple. As Hamilton observes, “God’s name is at stake in Jerusalem! And Jerusalem is rubble. For those who love God’s name, this is intolerable. Nehemiah is compelled to act, and he is compelled to call others to join him, so he continues in verse 17, Come, let’s rebuild Jerusalem’s wall, so that we will no longer be a disgrace.”<sup>2</sup>

But this had as its ultimately purpose—peace. But peace in what way? Ultimately, it was peace with God.

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<sup>2</sup> James Hamilton, *Exalting Jesus in Ezra-Nehemiah*. Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (p. 107). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Rebuilding these things helped Israel return to the glory of the former days, at least to some degree, when God was visibly present with them in the Shekinah glory. But this lesser degree showed that something was still not right. That something was only hinted at in the lesser outward glory.

Ezekiel tells us that when God was sending the people into captivity, that the Glory of Israel, that is the Word and Spirit, departed. There is nothing in Ezra, Nehemiah or their contemporary prophets that lead you believe the Glory returned in their days. In other words, the rebuilt city and walls created a longing. Into this longing, Haggai (who was there with Ezra and Nehemiah) said, of the future, “**And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts**” (**Hag 2:7**). This is what it means to have peace within the walls. And it was not ultimately had even in Nehemiah and Ezra’s reforms and rebuilding projects.

**Hamilton** continues, “**Today, God’s name is no longer at stake in a city with walls and gates. God’s name is now at stake in the lives of His people, who are the new temple of the Holy Spirit.**” My friend **Nick Batzig** writes something similar. “**Understanding the typological significance of**

Jerusalem, the Temple and the walls of the city (i.e. their spiritual parallels in the heavenly realities of the New Covenant) ... by his death and resurrection, Jesus showed Himself to be the true and greater Nehemiah. He builds the spiritual walls of the church through His redemptive labors.”<sup>3</sup>

We have seen this is the key with Zion, Israel, three days, David, temple, gate, Jerusalem, and thrones. So also the walls. The problem isn't so much that people want to apply Nehemiah and the walls to things like sin or rebuilding the church. The problem is skipping over Christ's **finished work** which has already accomplished all we need in this regard first. It is moving past the Gospel to get onto the “good” stuff.

But as Batzig explains, there is a fascinating parallel here. When Nehemiah began his work of rebuilding the walls, he had enemies who actively opposed him. When he was fully engaged in the act of rebuilding them, they called him to **come down** from the walls and away from **finishing the work**. Nehemiah's response? “**I am doing a great work, so**

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<sup>3</sup> **Nicholas T. Batzig**, “Ezra and Nehemiah: Types of Christ,” *FeedingOnChrist* (June 3, 2014) <http://feedingonchrist.com/ezra-nehemiah-types-christ/>

that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?” (Neh 6:2-3). When Jesus began his ministry, the enemies of God actively opposed him. When he was actively engaged in building the walls of Jerusalem—as he hung on the cross, they said to Him, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him” (Matt 27:42). Jesus, functionally responded to this opposition to His saving work by crying out, ‘It is finished’” (John 19:30).

How can I impress upon you today the importance of reading the Scripture with the Apostles rather than with the church growth movement or the TV headlines? While people may not understand why, it is vital to get this right, because the Gospel is the only thing that gives us true peace. And it is the power of God to save and to sanctify God’s people.

The Psalm ends the way Nehemiah’s third testimony does. “For my brothers and companions’ sake I will say, ‘Peace be within you!’ For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good” (Ps 122:8-9). That is what Nehemiah does. Jesus has done this even better. He

has sought out your eternal well-being by finishing all the rebuilding work necessary to give you peace with God. Your job? Believe him, trust him, turn to him in all things, for worship, for worry, or for works.

And with that, we can say with the people of Nehemiah's day, "Come, let us build the wall, that we may no longer suffer derision" (Neh 2:17). So they strengthened their hands for the good work (18). What is your good work? Fixing your eyes on the highest reality, not on types and shadows. All true good works begin here, with **faith alone**. Looking to Christ alone and to his completed work of bringing the heavenly Jerusalem down to you so that you may go up to be with him. This alone will get you through the terrible tauntings of the enemy, the temptations of giving up the labor, and the troubles that life brings your way.

And in return, you can work towards building walls that are holy, blameless, and pleasing in God's sight as he has revealed in his law. Because he has enabled you to do so. You can strengthen the fruit of the Spirit by the power of Spirit who dwells within you and makes you a holy temple with your brothers and sisters. All because you know the

righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit given to you through the Son's work, at the good and pleasing will of the Father, who is even now building us into something far greater than most dare dream or imagine.