

The City - the Seat of Heavenly Government

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Church is in a spiritual relationship with the heavenly government of this world and is instrumental in fulfilling God's purpose through absolute separation from Satan's power and complete fellowship with the Lord.

Scripture: Ezekiel 5:5, Ephesians 1:21

Topics: "Spiritual Identity", "Heavenly Government"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of Jerusalem as a symbol of God's heavenly government, tracing its lineage from Melchizedek to the New Jerusalem in Revelation. He explains that the Church, represented as a city, is a spiritual entity that operates under divine governance, with certain saints sharing in Christ's authority. Sparks contrasts the true MYSTERY JERUSALEM with MYSTERY BABYLON, highlighting the hidden nature of God's city, which can only be understood through spiritual revelation. He underscores the importance of the Church's heavenly nature and its role in governing the world through prayer and spiritual union with Christ, despite earthly opposition. Ultimately, he calls believers to recognize their identity as citizens of this heavenly city, empowered to fulfill God's purposes through their connection with Him.

Transcript

"Thus saith the Lord God: This is Jerusalem: I have set her in the midst of the nations, and countries are round about her" (Ezekiel 5:5).

We have traced Jerusalem from Melchizedek, king of Salem, to David, the great king, and then on to the Book of the Revelation, to the New Jerusalem. The government is always in the heavens. That fact is set forth in types and symbols, and in many other ways, and is also directly declared to be the case.

The Word of God also teaches that there is a place in that government reserved for certain saints. It is clear that the Throne of God can be shared, and the first sharer of that throne is the Lord Jesus. But He offers the same privilege to certain saints, telling them that on certain conditions - the same conditions as those upon which He shares His Father's throne - they shall share His throne. Thus a place is reserved in the ultimate government of this world for certain saints.

The figure used in connection with government is the figure of a city, out from which the government goes forth, and we know that city to be a people, not merely a place. Everything by which that city or people is constituted is heavenly. It is the nature which gives the place and the power. The nature is the

heavenliness of everything.

In the Book of the Revelation we have a certain city spoken of as MYSTERY BABYLON. That means, of course, that it is not the literal historic Babylon of this world, the city built by men in a literal way, but MYSTERY BABYLON is a spiritual Babylon, a people whose characteristics are moral and spiritual elements of Babylon. Knowing as we do what came in a moral and a spiritual way from the literal Babylon, we have very little difficulty in identifying MYSTERY BABYLON. The point is this, that this is Satan's counterfeit of God's city, the MYSTERY JERUSALEM. The word "mystery" used in this connection means something which does not appear on the surface. There is an expression seen, but the real thing is behind, and can only be discerned by spiritual intelligence. It is true of MYSTERY BABYLON. It is true of MYSTERY JERUSALEM. MYSTERY BABYLON is the great snare, deception, and trap of religious history, and all who get into the toils of MYSTERY BABYLON are deceived and blinded in a most terrible way. They can even resort to the most ghastly things known in history and think they do God service. We need not mention the name by which MYSTERY BABYLON is known to us.

What is true of MYSTERY BABYLON on the side of Satan, is true of MYSTERY JERUSALEM on the side of God, in the heavenly and glorious sense that therein are gathered up all those things which are hidden from the wise and the prudent, things hidden from the world and open only to those who have a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.

In the letter to the Ephesians, which, as we know, has the Church wholly in view, there are, at least by inference, all the metaphors which are used of the Church in the Word of God. The main metaphor in this letter, as we know, is

1. The Body.

Then we further have

2. The House.

3. The Temple.

4. The City.

5. The Ecclesia, or Called-out Company.

6. The Family.

7. The One New Man.

8. The Bride.

All these metaphors are in Ephesians. They are the various aspects of the one Church.

THE BODY:

Chapter 1 verse 23; 3:6; the whole of chapter 4.

THE HOUSE:

chapter 2 verse 19.

(In that connection I would suggest you follow through the words "Father" and "child" in this letter)

THE TEMPLE:

Chapter 2 verse 22.

THE CITY:

Chapter 2 verse 19; 3:18. (That carries your thought forward to the Book of the Revelation, the city which lieth foursquare; the breadth, the height, and the length thereof are equal.)

THE ECCLESIA:

Take every reference to the "Church."

THE FAMILY:

Chapter 3 verse 15.

THE ONE NEW MAN:

Chapter 2:15; 4:13,24.

THE BRIDE:

Chapter 5:25-28, 31-32.

So you see there are eight metaphors of the Church in this letter, and there are other inferences in the letter which you might do well to trace out.

The point to which we come is that there are three things which stand out in this inclusive presentation of the Church.

1. The Mystery.

The first is the mystery. That word, as you know, is peculiarly characteristic of the letter to the Ephesians. Paul writes about the mystery of His will; "...made known unto us the mystery of his will..." "...made known unto me the mystery..." "...the fellowship of the mystery..." "This is a great mystery..."; and finally, "the mystery of the gospel...."

While the phrase MYSTERY JERUSALEM does not occur in the Scriptures, it is clear that Jerusalem is the Church, and that the Church coming so fully into view in this letter to the Ephesians is related immediately and intimately to the mystery. So that the Church as the City, and the City as the Church, is the mystery, and, as we have just pointed out, the significance of the word "mystery" is that it is something which can only be known by revelation. It cannot be apprehended by any natural faculties whatsoever - the mystery, something to be revealed. It has always existed. Let us be clear about that. The Church, the MYSTERY JERUSALEM, can only be known by revelation of the Holy Spirit. It exists now. But the Church is still a hidden thing to this world. That is said deliberately, in spite of all the publicity, all the demonstration, all the effort that is made to impress the world with its existence. In spite of that the true Church is still hidden from the eyes of the world. The City is not seen by this world. The revelation, the unveiling of the mystery, has come only to the saints, not to the world, and has come by revelation of the

Holy Ghost. The remarkable thing is this, that you can still hold the New Testament in your hand, that you can hold this very letter to the Ephesians in your hand, and be able to recite it from the first to the last verse, and know all its terms, and all that it says, and still have the veil over the eyes of your hearts as to what the Church is. It needs a revelation by the Holy Spirit for one to see it.

2. The Heavenliness of Everything.

The second thing, which is clearly here alongside of the mystery, is the heavenliness of everything. Just as "mystery" is found these six or seven times in the letter to the Ephesians, so the "heavenlies" are the outstanding feature of the letter. That points plainly to the heavenly nature of the City, the Church. We merely state that once more, without dwelling upon it, as that is what is especially before us in our meditation, and we come back to it again and again.

3. The Governmental Feature.

The third thing which is here in this letter in relation to the Church, and for our present purposes the Church as "the City which hath foundations," is the governmental feature. In this letter you have those things which clearly indicate that, by reason of the heavenliness and spirituality of this people who constitute this City, this Church, there is a strong governmental factor. Look at one or two passages in this connection.

Ephesians 1:21-22: "Far above all rule, and authority and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church...." That is where you begin, with the Lord Himself, and in His capacity as Sovereign Head of the Church.

Chapter 2:6: "And raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus." So that in what He is, as well as where He is, is our privileged union. We are seen to be in spiritual union with Him, not only where He is in the heavenlies, but in what He is as in the heavenlies, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and so on. The Church is linked with Him in that position.

Chapter 3:10: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God." That is a governmental element, is it not? It is quite clear that, by the Church, God is governing the intelligence of principalities and powers, impressing the intelligence, instructing them, making known His many-sided wisdom.

Chapter 6 from verse 12. Here in the heavenlies, while the Church is seen in conflict, in wrestling, it is also seen in power. This is not a conflict to get advantage, to get ascendancy, but rather, to express ascendancy, to express the fact that these principalities and powers have been defeated and are subject to Christ and to His Church as in the heavenlies.

We need to make a comparison at this point between Ephesians 6 and Revelation 12. In Ephesians 6 the Church is seen to be in conflict with the principalities and powers in the heavenlies. In Revelation 12 the case is that of a company being met by a mighty onslaught of the evil one, the forces of darkness, and then hurling those forces down out of the heavenlies, and assuming fully and finally the place of government in the sphere where those forces have been in action. It is the end of the conflict, the great final battle with the enemy, in which he is hurled from his place in the air, or in the heavenlies. It is good to pass the eye on from Ephesians 6 to Revelation 12. In Ephesians 6 you see the conflict going on, the

age-long conflict. In Revelation 12 you see that conflict reaching its climax, and the issue is that those forces which in Ephesians 6 are still in the heavenlies are cast out of the heavenlies and no more place is found for them, and the Church is left in the heavenlies, in full occupation, in a governmental position in the throne.

The Factor of Election.

There is one other factor which is clearly seen in this letter to the Ephesians. It is the factor of election, and it is characteristic of both Jerusalems, the earthly and the heavenly. "This is Jerusalem: I have set her in the midst of the nations..." (Ezek. 5:5). That speaks of Divine appointment, and we know from very much in the Old Testament that Jerusalem was Divinely chosen, an elect city, an elect vessel, that under the sovereignty of God Jerusalem was picked out, appointed, and held for Divine purposes, though transient. Lifted into the realm of the great anti-type, that of which the earthly Jerusalem is but a faint picture, how very much more true that becomes. In the letter to the Ephesians, speaking of the Church in its full presentation, there are these tremendously strong notes upon election: "Chosen in Him," "Elect," and "Chosen according to the purpose of His will." God has determined from eternity that this heavenly Jerusalem shall occupy the place of government and supremacy.

Ruling in the Heavens now.

That which is of supreme importance and value, and which arises out of all that, is this, there is a link now between the Church and the heavenly government of this world in relation to the purpose of God in this dispensation. That sums up everything. That is clearly what comes out of a right reading of the letter to the Ephesians alone, but there is a very great deal more besides that letter to substantiate the statement.

Firstly, the government of this world is set in the heavens, and is functioning now. In spite of all that seems to the contrary it is functioning now. The Church is seen in a spiritual relationship with the heavenlies, and is said spiritually to be seated there now. The Church is therefore in vital link and association with the governing of this world now in a spiritual way, unto the purpose of God for this dispensation. The Church is not linked with the governing of this world for general purposes, but only in relation to God's purpose, and we must remember that its functioning in this governmental union is spiritual, and is secret. It is not manifest. The Church is not governing this world manifestly, but there is a government of it with which the Church is associated now in secret.

Heavenly Government as seen in Elisha and Daniel.

The Old Testament is full of this in illustration. One of the outstanding, if not the most outstanding, personal types of the Church in the Old Testament is Elisha, the only prophet who was ever anointed; the successor of Elijah, receiving the double portion of the Spirit, and doing the greater works. He is conspicuously the type of the Church as the successor of Christ, so to speak, on this earth. Look at the life of Elisha and see the marvellous expression of this feature of government; secret, hidden, spiritual government. There was a league of certain kings. They came together for purposes of warfare, moved out against their enemies, and found themselves in difficulty because there was no water. The story is one which has often brought its own message of encouragement and inspiration to our own hearts. "Thus saith the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches" (2 Kings 3:16). And in the morning the waters filled all the ditches; it was like a sea. You know the sequel. The story affords a notable instance of the heavenly government of a situation. Here are men who, in spite of faults, were men who represented God, one of them at least. The situation was critical. But for some supernatural heavenly ruling, intervention, there

would be an ignominious end. By silent, secret government of the heavens, brought in through a vessel, in this instance Elisha, the whole course of things is changed from tragedy and disaster to glory. No sound, nothing to see, nothing to hear, but the heavens rule.

Again, the Syrians would make war. Elisha is sitting in his home, in the secret place, and sends a message to the king of Israel: "Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are coming down" (2 Kings 6:9). And so the king of Israel saved himself there, not once nor twice. The king of Syria said to his war lords: "Will ye not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?" (verse 11). The reply, with an intelligence for which I cannot account, was: "Nay, my lord, O king, but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber." You see the secret, silent government, the undercutting of the enemy, the defeating of him without the drawing of a sword. This is heavenly government. The Old Testament is full of that sort of thing.

The city where the prophet dwelt is besieged. The prophet and his servant are in the city, and the servant sees the besieging army and cries: "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" Elisha prays: "Lord... open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." That is heavenly government. You know the sequel to that.

We pass to the book of Daniel, and here we should have more than enough to occupy us, for the whole story is very true to the fact that the heavens do rule, that God ruleth in the kingdom of men. Think of Nebuchadnezzar, of his attempts against the Testimony, and the vessel of the Testimony, and mark the ruling of the heavens against those attempts of the mightiest of the kings, this head of gold, the highest of them all. It is a great thing to think that Nebuchadnezzar's was the greatest kingdom that this world has known. All those succeeding empires were of inferior cast. And yet the heavens ruled in that greatest of the empires. That rule was being expressed through a little handful of men right in the midst of the strength of this opposition to God. Right in the heart of that violent antagonism to God these few were set; the heavens expressed their government through an instrument which in itself was not much. How mighty was that rule! But it was secret. Where did Daniel rule? In the place of prayer! Where did Elisha rule? In his own house! There is a secret, spiritual going forth of heavenly power, heavenly government, which cannot be explained. There are none of the outward features of a great empire ruling. It is all spiritual; it is all hidden. To the natural eye there is no tracing it. Men only know it as they come into the sphere of its effect. Rulers and governments set against the purpose of God: that is one thing. Rulers, governments, empires, nations set with all their might, backed up by the powers of darkness, against the purpose of God, yet the purpose of God being fulfilled, and that through an instrument which in itself is worth practically nothing: that is the story.

What is that instrument? What about its nature, its position? Everything hangs upon that. It is essentially spiritual. It is heavenly, in its life, its relationships and all its resources. That is the city which rules, which governs, and is destined to govern for eternity. It is a spiritual people, a heavenly people, with all that word "heavenly" means.

That implies on the one hand, that a lack of spirituality, a lack of heavenliness of life, is the sure way to defeat. We may move out into this world and find ourselves up against the governments of this world, up against the rulers of this world, up against the laws which men have made, and these things may be dead set against the realisation of God's purpose in this dispensation. Governments may close and lock doors, rulers may withstand, decrees may be formed, nations, countries, may be closed, yet the heavens

continue to rule, and all God's purpose is still possible. A people in heavenly union with the Lord, by the exercise of that heavenly function can still be the instrument of fulfilling God's purpose.

For example, I do not believe for a moment that the present regime in Russia is defeating God's end for this dispensation. If the truth were known, as it will be known one day, probably it is facilitating God's end. Though terrible may be the way, and costly, God's end is not being defeated. The heavens still rule.

Mark you, the heavens demand an instrument in this world through which to exercise their rule, and you and I, by absolute separation from the realm of Satanic power and authority in a spiritual way, and in complete fellowship and harmony with the Lord in heaven, can still be instrumental in fulfilling God's purpose, in spite of every bit of opposition. Man, as we have said, may close doors, but God can say: "I have set before thee an opened door, which no man can shut." Men may forbid this and that. They may forbid preaching; they may forbid the printing; they may forbid all sorts of things, and still things be done. God has secret ways of doing things, through prayer and real spiritual fellowship with Him, which are after the character of this Elisha work in the secret place, without going in person to the scene at all. But, oh, the importance of being in the place where, when everything closes along the natural line, the work is not finished, is not closed! I can believe that countries will close, and governments will prohibit, and perhaps missionaries will have to quit. I can believe that all kinds of things are going to happen as the result of Satan's last effort to quench the purpose of God, as he uses man, governments, and peoples against the Gospel, against the Lord. But I do not believe that God's purpose will be curtailed thereby, nor do I believe that the purpose of God is just going to be effected in a sovereign way direct from heaven. I believe that it is still to be concluded through those who are in spiritual union with Him. We may not go into the places, but it will be done. God has His ways. But even if we do go in, what can we hope for of real eternal effectiveness, unless we are in utter union and league with heaven, unless we have made a complete break with all that is earthly, though "Christian" in name? Oh, the tremendous power of heavenliness and spirituality!

All this is what is meant by the City, which is a heavenly City, and that City is called to govern now in a spiritual way, even as it will function in government in a literal way in the ages to come. You and I are fellow-citizens. We may be the weak things, the foolish things, the things which are despised, and the things which are not, but God has linked tremendous possibilities with such, provided they are under the anointing of the Holy Ghost; which is only another way of saying, provided they are in league with heaven, joined with the reigning Lord. Mighty things can be done in the secret place. The government of the heavens is to come in through the weak saints by prayer. There may be times when no more than living in touch with the Lord will be possible. Words may be finished, all outward forms of expression may have to be suspended. Living in touch with God is a mighty thing. For myself I covet that more than anything, far, far more than public ministry. All forms of public expression are secondary compared with a life of secret fellowship with God, and any kind of public ministry which does not come out of that is of comparatively little value. There is a mighty thing to come out of our hidden life with God, more than we know. There may be no sight and no sound, but something will happen. The Lord make us true citizens of the City which hath foundations.

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