

"No Abiding City ..."

"For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come" (Heb. 13:14).

As the writer speaks of seeking after a city, his earlier thoughts of Abraham, Sarah and other ancient patriarchs might come to one's mind. Of them he wrote, *"For he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10)*. Later, in the same chapter we read, *"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things make it manifest that they are seeking after a country of their own. And if indeed they had been mindful of that country from whence they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they seek a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed of them to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city" (Heb. 11:13-16)*.

John, in his Revelation, wrote, *"And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2)*. The lyrics of both inspired and uninspired poets have sung of the abiding city. Thus we sing, "Looking for a city," "I am going to a city," and "There is a habitation ..."

Christians must remember Paul's words: *"Wherefore we faint not, but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:16-18)*. Such perceptions were frequently expressed by Paul. He told the Corinthians, *"We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7)*. To the Colossians he said, *"If then ye be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1)*. Has not our Master urged, *"Lay not up for yourself treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where thy treasure is, there will be thy heart also" (Matt. 6:19-21)*.

Someday our world will collapse. *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat" (2 Pet. 3:10)*. Peter could write those

words with utmost confidence for he had heard Jesus said, "*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word will not pass away*" (Matt. 24:35). The Psalmist writer concurred: "... *You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; Yes they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed ...*" (Psa. 102:25-27). Since our world will pass away, it behooves us all to give priority to those things which will not pass away!

But the writer's words, "*We have not here an abiding city ... but we seek after that which is to come,*" had special meaning to those to whom this letter was directed. Jerusalem was the center of Judaism, a holy city. There was the temple. There priests daily busied themselves in the varieties of duties in that temple service. There one of Aaron's descendants offered blood for the sins of the nation in a ritual 15 centuries old. The doom of that city was certain. Daniel, in his prophecy of the seventy weeks and the Messiah pointed to the city's demise. Jesus warned of its end in the temple sermon (Matt. 24). Jews who were Christians had been shown the superior nature of the religion of Christ and the words, "*We have not here an abiding city,*" was an omen of the destruction of those things which shadowed the salvation in Christ. Let each of us seek for that city which is to come!

Jim McDonald