

independence will be reversed. The city, the new Jerusalem, becomes a permanent Eden, free from curse and oppression, and a place of unbroken fellowship with the Lord.

4 They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.

"They will see His face" – even Moses could only experience God's glory but had to be protected from seeing God's face, Exodus 33:20, 23.

"Name... on their foreheads" – in contrast to the mark of beast, Rev 13:16-17, those believing and therefore belonging to God would bear His mark as His protected property.

• **For further study**, see Rev. 3:11-12, 7:2-8, 14:1.

5 There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

"They will not need... light" – because God, who is of radiant glory and truth, dwells in "unapproachable light" and therefore night and darkness is banished.

"They will reign" – under Jesus their king, believers, who knew opposition, ridicule and persecution in the present order on earth, will enjoy a shared authority with Jesus over the new earth in the new kingdom order.

IN PRACTICE John's revelation, which gives us the final book of the 66 books of the Bible, is his account of being enabled to see into heaven and way forward to the end time. This is a time of a new world order with a peaceful and just rule under Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords. This will have some of the characteristics of the original creation – the river of the water of life and the constantly-cropping tree of life planted on each side. This represents a flow of the good and peaceful life of God from this holy city, to the wider world. And that's where we become part of the picture. It has not been established yet. We do not know when the return of Jesus will come. But we who have recognised who He is and submitted our independent lives to come under Him, are already those who, like a new kind of priest, are privileged to serve Him and to know Him and belong to Him. We don't have to look far to see what a conflicted world we live in – but at the same time, we are the peacekeeping force of Jesus' united nation and He is deploying us already, trained to recognise what is good and deal with evil spiritual insurgents. There's a way to go, and setbacks will come, but every good and godly action carried out under the lordship of Jesus builds His righteous kingdom a little bit more.

QUESTION *Why does knowing the final destination, help us to journey well in a way which helps others?*

PRAYER Lord, we put ourselves in Your hands that You might bless us with Your peace and love, and the ability to be peacemakers who bring Your order and show Your way wherever You direct us. Praise You that in Christ Jesus alone, our destination and our ultimate peace, is assured. Amen.

The Living Word

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Bible readings for Sunday, November 10, 2019, with commentary notes

Bible study on Revised Common Lectionary passages for **Sunday, November 10**

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Remembrance Sunday

Theme: From dark times a bright and peaceful destination beckons

Micah 4:1-8 – An end to war and conflict in the last days

Matthew 5:43-48 – Jesus' call is to treat others with His kind of love

Revelation 22:1-5 – The promise of a bright, new, healed world of peace

Micah 4:1-8 – An end to war and conflict in the last days

In God's plan, people avoid war by knowing Him and His ways

1 In the last days, the mountain of the LORD'S temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and peoples will stream to it.

"In the last days" – not the rebuilding of the temple, which took place 200 years after Micah's prophecy, but the end times kingdom of the Lord's return, yet to come.

"Highest of the mountains" – figuratively and spiritually. The "mountain of the Lord's temple", like the place of Solomon's Temple, is the place where God makes Himself known and accessible.

2 Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us His ways, so that we may walk in His paths."

The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

"The law will go out" – the teaching of God's ways, the word, will go out from this spiritual centre, drawing people in. In the OT, "nations" means Gentiles. At this time of Jewish history, 8th century BC, it was extraordinary to imagine a wide constituency of believers.

3 He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their

spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

"Swords into ploughshares" – Micah's contemporary Isaiah spoke out an almost identical message to these verses.

"Beat... into pruning hooks" A considerable amount of work for the smith, and only to be considered by the farmer in an era of prolonged stability and peace.

• **For further study**, see Isaiah 2:2-4

4 Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken.

"Vine... fig tree" – a picture of peaceful and enduring prosperity. It would take years to plant fig trees and see vines establish and come into fruit.

"Lord Almighty has spoken" – more literally, "the mouth of the LORD of hosts (or armies) has spoken" (NASB and Amplified). Using the military title emphasises God's victory and right to rule in this peace.

5 All the nations may walk in the name of their gods, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.

"The nations... but we will walk" – those devoted to God may be outnumbered by unbelievers, but will be characterised by a close adherence and unity as they play their part in fulfilling His eternal plan.

6 "In that day," declares the LORD, "I will gather the lame; I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought to grief.

"In that day" – in other words, in the last days, v.1, a time beyond our immediate reach, a time of God's sovereign deciding.

7 I will make the lame My remnant, those driven away a strong nation. The LORD will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day and forever.

"The lame My remnant... a strong nation" – it was more usual for the remnant to be assimilated into the new rule, or just lost. Israel's remnant would become the foundation of the new order – a sign of remarkable grace.

• **For further study**, read Deut. 30:1-5, 2 Kings

IN PRACTICE This passage looks forward in a long-distance vision reminding us that man's continual conflicts and wars are the opposite of God's intentions to establish His kingdom. The time will come when the Lord will return and establish His eternal rule of peace. His place of presence, where people can meet with Him and know Him, will be like the fulfilment of the purpose of the temple, where people used to go to worship. Now this will be a kind of brightly-lit spiritual city rather than an architectural temple, and Revelation chapters 21-22 tells us more. Conflicts, on the scale of a war between nations, or even small local disputes, are shocking and divert our attention from God on to the intentions of each party and the human personalities behind them. Micah and Isaiah bring a different focus. They call us back to what God is saying, and the perspective of eternity, because these helpfully guide our prayer and worship.

QUESTION *When we are faced with political divisions, how do we go to the watchtower, the high point, to gain God's perspective?*

Matthew 5:43-48 – Jesus' call is to treat others with His kind of love

We are to grow into a spiritual maturity big enough to love unconditionally

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.'

"Love your neighbour" is a command found in Leviticus 19:18 but there is no instruction to hate enemies anywhere in Moses writings, although it could have been inferred from the Lord's instructions about certain Canaanite towns, or zeal expressed as hate of evil. The saying Jesus quoted was an elaboration by the Pharisee tradition.

44-45 "But I tell you, love your enemies

19:31, Isaiah 10:21, Jeremiah 29:10-14, Ezra 9:8, Nehemiah 1:2.

8 As for you, watchtower of the flock, stronghold of Daughter Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come to Daughter Jerusalem."

"Stronghold of Daughter Zion" – the Ophel, "stronghold" or acropolis, the highest and most fortified part of the city. A figure of speech where the part stands for the whole, meaning that greatness returns to Jerusalem generally.

"Watchtower of the flock" – an alternative but intriguing interpretation is that the place of this name, Migdal-eder, would see the return of the greatness of the David Empire. It is a location near Bethlehem, Genesis 35:19-21.

and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

"Love... pray for those that persecute" – not loving in a sentimental sense but showing God's love in practical ways including forgiveness.

• **For further study**: Leviticus 19:18, Psalm 139:19-22, 140:9-11. How do you evaluate the Pharisees seeing Leviticus as a command to love those who love in return, and the Psalms as saying they should hate their enemies?

46 "If you love those who love you, what

reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

"Even the tax collectors" – a group who, as representatives of the Roman authorities, were disliked and excluded. As a result, the unpopular tax collectors stuck together. Jesus was saying that the Pharisees attitude of loving their own was in effect imitating what the tax collectors did.

47 "And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?"

"Even pagans" – bracketed together with tax collectors, previous verse, and their behaviour

IN PRACTICE The stumbling block in Jesus' words here is His call for us to be *telios*, which in most Bible versions reads as 'perfect'. That, we know, is unrealistic this side of eternity! However there are other shades of meaning which reflect more of the journey, rather than the destination. The Message renders what Jesus is saying as "Grow up! You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it." This is a fair conclusion to His teaching about both Pharisees and tax collectors forming exclusive cliques to look after their own. The Amplified Bible urges us to "grow into complete maturity of godliness in mind and character". Some who declare themselves to be our enemies are well-nigh impossible to love, especially if they are armed and destructive. We need to do, what we need to do, by debate, ballot box and at times, proportionate action – but at the same time, examining our motives and our hearts against Jesus' teaching.

QUESTION *When the opportunity presents, will we be found seeking reconciliation, or repainting the divisive murals that keep the conflict alive?*

Revelation 22:1-5 – The promise of a bright, new, healed world of peace

The life and light of God reach out in a flow of transformation

1-2 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city.

"River of the water of life" – John's vision has many other biblical elements – the description of Eden, Genesis 2:10, the river of endless supply in Psalm 46:4, the river seen by Ezekiel flowing from the new temple, Ezekiel 47:1 and by Zechariah flowing out from Jerusalem, Zech. 14:8. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit flowing from those who believe in Him like "streams of living water", John 7:37.

• **For further study**, read Genesis 2:8-14, Ezekiel 47:1-12, Zech. 14:8, John 7:37-39

compared with the Pharisees who were the ones quoting the saying, v.43.

48 "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

"Be perfect" – a high call, but God does not lower the standard to allow for our human sinfulness. Rather, He empowers us to live up to it. "Perfect" in Greek is teleios which has the meaning of whole, complete or spiritually mature.

"As your heavenly Father is" – in the context of preceding verses, suggests being perfect is about being free enough to love others without condition, as God loves us.

2-3 On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

"Tree of life" – an allusion to Genesis 2:9 and 3:3, where the tree of life stood in the centre of the garden. The vision in Ezekiel 47:12 references medicinal trees and fruit.

"Healing of the nations" – healing needed from the results of the curse, v.3

3 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him.

"No longer... any curse" – the curse (or anti-blessing) caused by mankind's fall into sin and