
Mount Zion

Mount Zion is not a particularly large mountain. In fact, if you search for images of Mount Zion on the Internet, you will have trouble identifying anything that looks like a mountain. It's a small hill in Jerusalem, and today it happens to be covered by a variety of buildings, including the Dome on the Rock, the third most sacred place for Muslims. Yet, in spite of the fact that Mount Zion is nothing more than an insignificant hill, the Bible proclaims that it is the most significant mountain in the world.

Mount Zion, earlier in Scripture, had a different name. In Genesis 22, we read that Abraham travelled to Mount Moriah to offer his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice. Mount Moriah is located in what is now Jerusalem, a hill that became known as Mount Zion. Most pictures that depict this scene of sacrifice show Abraham in a deserted area, but we know from Genesis 14 that Melchizedek was king in the city of Salem (the Hebrew for "city of Salem" would sound like Ir Salem, from which Jerusalem is derived), making the place where Abraham offered Isaac an inhabited place. Melchizedek, as we know, was a priest of the Most High God, who is identified in the book of Hebrews as the same God that Abraham worshipped. Even though the hill which has become identified as Mount Zion had a long history with God's people, it did not become part of the territory controlled by the nation of Israel until David conquered it early in his reign.

David built himself a palace on the hill we know as Mount Zion, and his son, Solomon, built the temple of the Lord. The temple was known as the house of God, or, better, God's palace from which he ruled over his people. In the Old Testament, God ruled his people through the king who had his throne on Mount Zion. Thus, Mount Zion becomes the place from which God reigns over his people in the Old Testament. But God's reign was not limited to a particular territory as was the case with the Canaanite gods (who also were believed to rule from mountains). God ruled over the entire world from Mount Zion, the small hill in Jerusalem. And that is what gave it significance, not its size or physical stature among mountains. It was God's presence and reign that makes Mount Zion the greatest mountain in the world, at least in Old Testament times.

Many have compared Mount Zion to the fulcrum or pivot point for the world. This is a helpful comparison, especially when we consider the essential nature of the pivots on our irrigation system. So important is the pivot, the centre point for the irrigation, that the whole assembly is referred to as the pivot, while we know, in fact, that the pivot is technically just the centre point. The centre point, the pivot, is essential for it is through the pivot that water flows, and it is essential for without the pivot, the irrigation assembly would wander off course. In the same way, Mount Zion is understood to provide life (water) to the world, and it is from Mount Zion that the world remains on track and functional. Without Mount Zion, Scripture teaches us, the world would not survive.

Mount Zion, then, becomes symbolic for the reign of God. In Psalm 44, a psalm which extols the virtues of Mount Zion, we see some of the impact of the reign of God over the universe. While the psalm does not cover every aspect of God's reign, it does tell us that the nations of the world will find the mountain to be unconquerable. For God's people who dwell within the city, they will experience safety and security,

no matter what happens in the rest of the world. And, although mentioned almost in passing, Mount Zion will be a place of righteousness, a place where all people will be treated with justice, respect, and compassion. It is noteworthy that the name Melchizedek is translated as “King of Righteousness,” for he foreshadowed the reign of God as providing a kingdom where everything is made and kept right. These are just some of the benefits of having God as king as revealed to us by Psalm 44.

Since Jesus returned to heaven, the small hill in Jerusalem has lost much of its importance with regard to the reign of God. If, in the Old Testament, God reigned through the Davidic king, in the New Testament, he reigns through the descendant of David, Jesus Christ, who is seated at his right hand. In fact, in Hebrews 12:22 we learn that Mount Zion is no longer considered to be located in Jerusalem but rather is understood to be where God’s heavenly throne is and from which he will reign for all eternity. Yet, even while the location has changed, the reign of God continues.

Thus, when we are reading Scripture and encounter Mount Zion, we should be aware that what makes that small hill in Jerusalem so significant is that it is representative of God’s reign. It is the pivot which makes life on this earth possible, for from that place God accomplishes his will. Extolling the virtues of Zion, God’s capital city, is equivalent to extolling the virtues of God’s Kingdom, a Kingdom where all things will be made right and which will never end. A small hill is seen as a great mountain, for what happens on and from that small hill changes everything.

Pastor Gary