

People reminisce a lot about life back in the good old days. We idealize a past where everyone was happy, life was simple, the sun gave days of play, and winter's snow fell deep. Whenever life today gets complicated by family tension, financial strain, or the fear of violence, we look back longingly on the way things were, and we dream of a day when it will be like that again.

The Book of Revelation concludes with that kind of dreamy reverie. John's church endured misunderstanding and alarm. Christians suffered, but they weren't the only ones. The Roman army entered Jerusalem and destroyed the holiest sites of Judaism. Before Jesus died, he looked at the temple's huge foundation stones and predicted that in the next generation, not one of them would stand upon another. He was right. With Jerusalem in ruins, many of those who found their spiritual source in that city reminisced about the good old days.

So when John sees a new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, he gives hope to those who thought they'd never see their city again. The new Jerusalem needed no lamps because it gleamed with the glory of God. The high wall protecting the city opened with twelve gates, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel, each one guarded by an angel. These gates opened to the four sides of the city, in order to welcome all the nations. The twelve foundation stones bore the names of the twelve apostles. The city stood on the ancient Jewish and the younger Christian traditions. It was the place where God dwelled.

Surprisingly, there was no temple in the city at all. It was hard to accept a destroyed Jerusalem without a temple. But now John says, the new Jerusalem doesn't have a temple either. Doesn't need one. Because the city itself is like God's temple. It is the dwelling place of God.

The Book of Revelation offers a vision of hope that God's plan will triumph over all earthly struggles. We need this vision. Our families yearn for an idealized home where all will be at peace. Jerusalem today aches for security and peace, for an end of bitter disputes among angry, well-armed, and determined instigators of conflict. Even the church of the holy sepulcher there, the holiest of Christian shrines, has multiple owners who cannot get along. When the Holy Father visits Ukraine next month, he will stand among Christians who do not want him there, who believe that the Roman Catholic Church has persecuted them for centuries, and who are unprepared for reconciliation. In many ways we all need a message of hope.

It won't come from our nation alone. We like to think we are the promised land, the place where peace and prosperity flourish. But disputes run harsh from the halls of congress to the talk shows. We have a wonderful country and a marvelous constitution, but our nation is flawed by the glorification of violence, disregard for other cultures, and relentless attempts to keep religions quiet.

We all long for the good old days. But they are not in the past, nor are they in the present. They lie in the future glory that God has prepared for us, when the holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem, becomes not just God's dwelling place, but ours.