

Mount Zion, the City of the Living God

"Instead of coming to Mount Sinai, where there is fear and foreboding, the readers have joyfully 'come' (which is the same term used in 12:18) to Mount Zion." Tom Schreiner

The Significance of "Come"

"The Greek word for "come" (προσέρχομαι) in our text is that technical or religious term which had been used repeatedly by the apostle in this Epistle to express a sacred access or coming to God in His worship: see Hebrews 4:16, Hebrews 7:25, Hebrews 10:1 (last clause "comers thereunto"), Hebrews 11:6." Pink

The word literally means "to approach, to draw near."

The readers would have understood the striking reality that, because of the atoning work of their great High Priest and Mediator, they now have access to the presence of God. Whereas at Sinai the command of God and their own fear prohibited them from "drawing near," under the New Covenant the law is fulfilled, the prohibitive command is removed, and they are invited to "come boldly unto the throne of grace," (4:16) and to "draw near in full assurance of faith" (10:22), and not to "draw back unto perdition" (10:39).

The History of Zion

The first use of the word Zion in the Old Testament is in 2 Samuel 5:6,7. Pink observes:

- The priesthood had been deplorably corrupted (1 Sam 2:22-25)
- Saul – the people's choice for king – had reduced them to the lowest degradation (1 Samuel 28:7 and 31:1-7)
- Saul and Jonathan slain in the Philistines' triumph
- The Lord brings forth the man of His own choosing – David
- David conquers the Jebusites who occupied Jerusalem and it becomes Israel's stronghold – Zion, the city of God and of David
- "Zion, then, stands for the highest revelation of Divine grace in the Old Testament."

"Zion lay to the south-west of Jerusalem, being the oldest and highest part of that ancient city. It was outside of the city itself and separate from it, though in Scripture frequently identified with it. Mount Zion had two heads or peaks: Moriah on which the temple was erected, the seat of the worship of God; and the other, whereon the palace of David was built, the royal residence of the kings of Judah a striking figure of the priestly and kingly offices meeting in Christ. Zion, then, was situated in the best part of the world Canaan, the land which flowed with milk and honey; in the best part of that land in Judah's portion; in the best part of his heritage Jerusalem; and in the best part of that metropolis the highest point, the "city of David." Let the interested reader carefully ponder the following passages and observe the precious things said of Zion: Psalm 48:2, Psalm 48:3; Psalm 50:2; Psalm 132:13, Psalm 132:14; Psalm 133:3." Pink

The City of the Living God

While Zion in the Old Testament is a real, material place, the promise to rebuild Zion is (Psalm 102:16) is fulfilled ultimately in the heavenly Zion, for we find in Psalm 110:2 that the Lord and his Messiah reign from Zion. Zion will not be shaken or destroyed but will endure forever (Psalm 125:1; cf. Isa. 24:23).

The earthly Jerusalem points upward to the heavenly Jerusalem. But it also points forward to the heavenly Jerusalem as the eternal home of the believer – the city “to come” (13:14) to which believers are “looking forward” (11:10). Paul says that this heavenly Jerusalem is the mother of all believers (Galatians 4:26).

The Characteristics of the Heavenly Jerusalem

“An innumerable company of angels”

“Angels” were the focus of the author when he opened this letter (1:1 – 2:18; see especially 1:4-7, 1:13, 2:5, 2:7, 2:9, 2:16).

The heavenly city is inhabited by countless angels (Deut. 33:2 [compare Psalm 68:17]; Daniel 7:10; Jude 14; Rev. 5:11).

Angels have one purpose: they serve at the pleasure of the One whose dwelling place is the heavenly Jerusalem. They are “sent forth” by God (1:14) as “ministering spirits” – servants serving the people of God at God’s command (Psalm 104:4). They worship God continually (1:6; cf. Psalm 148:2).

The Fellowship of Saints and Angels

“Redeemed sinners who have fellowship with the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit, are of one spirit with all the heavenly hosts, for there is a union of sentiment between them. Christians have been brought into a state of amity and friendship with the holy angels: they are members of the same family (Ephesians 3:15), are united under the same Head (Colossians 2:10), and joined together in the same worship (Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 5:9-14). We are “come unto” them by a spiritual relation, entering into association with them, sharing the benefits of their kind offices, for “are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14). The angels are “fellow servants” with believers “that have the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 19:10). Wondrous fact is this that sinners of the earth, while here in this world, have communication with the angels in Heaven, for they are constantly engaged in the same worship of God in Christ as we are: Thus there is perfect oneness of accord between us.” Pink

Are you prepared to describe the experience of your salvation to an angel (or two, or two thousand)? 1 Peter 1:8-12

“festal gathering” of angels (modern translations) or *“general assembly”* of the firstborn

To what phrase is the Greek word **πανήγυρις** attached:

ESV: “to innumerable angels in *festal gathering*” GR: **πανήγυρις** (12:22)

KJV: “to **the general assembly** and church of the firstborn” GR: **πανήγυρις** (12:23)

The Greek word relates directly to **the celebration of Old Testament feasts** by the people of God. There are zero references in the Old Testament to angels gathering for the sacrificial feasts which were provided for the remission of the sins of the people of God. Angels would have no basis for engaging in a feast that celebrates a saving act which they have not experienced (1 Peter 1:8ff).

See Ezekiel 46:11, Hosea 2:11; 2:13; 9:5; Amos 5:21

Since the context of Hebrews 12:22-24 is forward looking to the heavenly Jerusalem, it seems the best interpretation of **πανήγυρις** is to attach it to “the church of the firstborn” – the elect and chosen believers of God – which anticipates the eternal heavenly feast at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9; Luke 14:16ff; Matthew 26:29).