

Introduction to Revelation
Session VI – New Creation (Rev 21-22)
June-July 2012

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The final chapters of Revelation look at God's plan to restore all of Creation, banishing evil and brokenness forever, and establishing His perfect, eternal rule.

‘Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.”’ (Revelation 21:1-8)

John speaks of a new creation. Some people have taken this to mean that the world is destroyed and a totally new one created, but other scriptures suggest that *this* Earth is renewed (Is 65:17; Rom 8:18-25).

N.T. Wright puts it like this: ‘The New Creation is not a *creatio ex nihilo*, a creation out of nothing. It’s a *creatio ex vetere*, a creation out of the old and the model for that is Jesus’ own resurrection. Jesus’ body was transformed and still had the marks of the nails. The signs of love are still there.’

This new creation has similarities and dissimilarities with the old creation. It is physical. It is a world with trees and plants and buildings. But it is different in the things that are absent: There is no sea (Rev 21:1). We have seen throughout the book that the sea represents the origins of evil and chaos and separation, and so the absence of sea indicates that those things will no longer exist in God’s world.

There will be no more crying, or pain or death (Rev 21:4). John alludes to Isaiah 25:8 ‘He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces’ and Isaiah 51:10-11 which speaks of God ridding the world of sorrow and drying up the sea at the Exodus: ‘Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over? And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.’

In verse 6 the one on the throne says ‘It is done’, judgment is passed and the world is put to rights. It reminds us of the cry of Jesus at the cross ‘it is finished.’

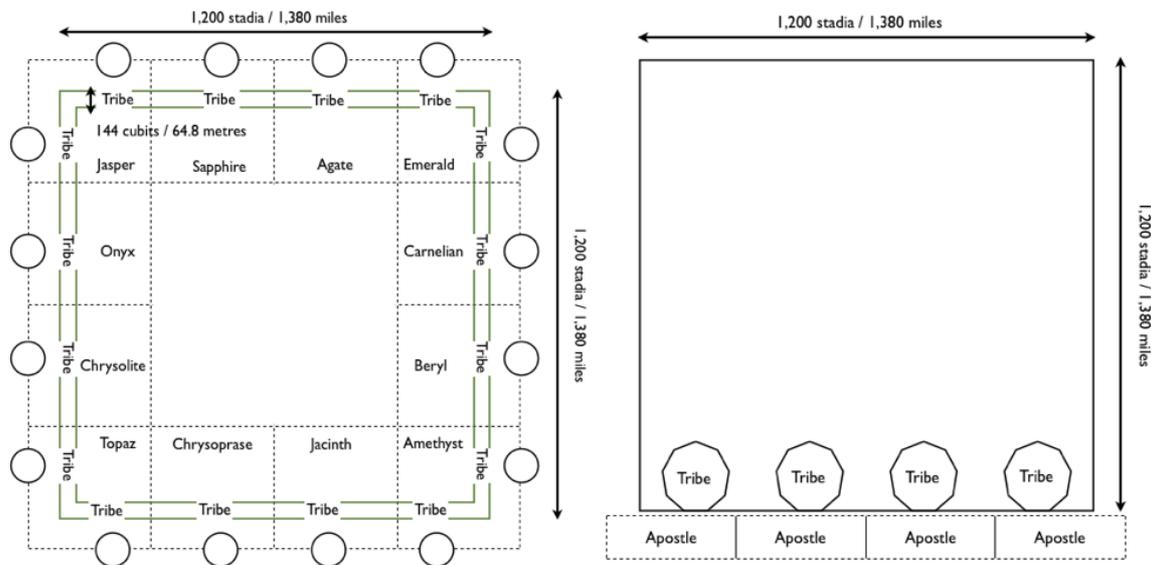
Revelation 21:9-22:5 recapitulate the same vision. They go back to before the ‘it is finished’ and unpack in more detail what this New Creation looks like. In particular John picks up on the phrase he introduced in v2, ‘the New Jerusalem.’

The External Features of the New Jerusalem

The New Jerusalem is described like a bride (Rev 21:2, 9-11), which is meant to contrast with the whore of Babylon in chapter 17. The depiction of the New Jerusalem is based heavily on Ezekiel chapters 40-48 which speak of a new temple, using similar language and measurements.

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The city is exactly square shaped, literally ‘four-cornered’ (*tetragonos*). The length and width are equal at 1,200 stadia, which is about 1,380 miles (Rev 21:16). The walls have four gates on each side, and on each is inscribed one of the tribes of Israel (Rev 21:12-13, cf. Ezek 48:31-34). Each one is also manned by an angel, which probably represent the people of God like the elders do in chapters 4-5.

There are twelve foundation stones, and on each of these is the name of one of the apostles (Rev 21:14). So the construction contains both the OT people of God and the NT people of God.

The foundation stones are adorned with precious stones (or perhaps they *are* giant precious stones, cf. Is 54:11-12) and the whole city is overlaid with gold (cf. 1 Kings 6:20-22). This seems to be an allusion to Exodus 28:17-20; 39:8-14 which describes the High Priest’s breastplate as being a golden square with twelve precious stones embedded into it, and each is engraved with the name of a tribe of Israel.

It is interesting that the apostles are in the foundation and the tribes in the gates. You might expect it to be the other way round, since OT Israel came before the NT apostles in redemptive history. The reversal of expectations demonstrates that the fulfilment of Israel’s promises have come in Christ who, together with the apostolic witness of his work, forms the foundation of the new temple, the church, which is the new Israel. This is reminiscent of Ephesians 2:19-21, which speaks of Jews and Gentiles in the people of God and says: ‘**So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.**’ (See too Heb 11:10; 12:22-23).

Verse 16 says that the city’s length and width and height are equal. So it is 1,200 stadia tall as well as wide and deep. It’s a cube. In the temple the Most Holy Place was a cube (1 Kings 6:20; Ezek 41:4). John’s picture of the New Jerusalem, with the cubic dimensions and the twelve precious stones is designed to tell us that the New Jerusalem is like the Most Holy Place: the place where God dwelt, and which humans could previously not approach. The Most Holy Place was bigger in each subsequent reworking. In the tabernacle it was 5m³ and in the temple it was 9m³. Here it’s 1,380 miles³. In Rev 21:3 we read that the climax of the story is God coming to dwell with man: ‘**And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”**’

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The Internal Features of the New Jerusalem

There is no need for a temple any more in the New Creation, because the Temple *is* God Himself and His presence (Rev 21:22). John also says that there will be no need for a sun or moon to shine on the City, because God will give the light required (Rev 21:23). I don't think this necessarily means that there will be no sun or moon but rather that we won't depend on them for life, because God Himself will sustain us. (Compare too Rev 21:23 with Is 60:19)

Nations and Kings bring their glory into the city (Rev 21:24-26, cf. Is 60:3, 5, 11), which speaks of there being a multinational presence, peace between the nations, and Kings submitting to God. The gates will never be shut (v25) in the New Jerusalem, which indicates that there will be no need for the City to be protected against attack in this perfect world.

Rev 22:1-5 looks at some of the landscape features of the New Jerusalem. It's an incredibly fertile place. There is living water that flows from the throne of God and the Lamb. It's reminiscent of the depiction of Eden in Gen 2:10 and the prophecies of Ezek 47:1-9 and Zech 14:8. Either side of the river is a tree of life (probably trees plural, cf. Ezek 47:12), which is again reminiscent of Eden. The trees yield fruit monthly and their leaves heal the nations (Rev 22:2).

In this New Creation, the Father and the Lamb share the throne (Rev 22:1, 3). Throughout the book we have seen a progression: The Lamb approaches the Father, stands by His side and now takes his rightful place, enthroned for eternity.

Believers in the New Creation serve God and have His name written on their heads (Rev 22:4). This represents ownership, protection, but also dignity, holiness and a priestly role. In Exodus 28:36-38, Aaron wears a priestly turban, on which is inscribed 'Holy to the Lord.' We are told that we will 'see His face' (Rev 22:4) which is the outworking of the blessing of Numbers 6:25-27. In the OT, full revelation of God's face and name is said to bring death because of His holiness and our un-holiness (Ex 33:20), but now seeing God's face and having his name on our heads is a means of eternal life.

The Purpose of the Vision

The picture that John paints of the New Creation is the solution to all of the brokenness in the world. God deals with evil once and for all, eradicating it permanently. He remakes the world, perfect and incorruptible. It's like a new Eden, where man lives as he was intended to; pure and in service of God. It's like the Holy of Holies, with God's presence right in the centre, but with us welcome to draw near. It's a life-giving, perfect resolution to the story of history, and it's all made possible by the death and resurrection of the Lamb.

G.K. Beale's *The Temple and the Church's Mission* explores the theme of the ever-expanding dwelling place of God throughout Scripture: The story begins with **Eden**, a place that was meant to expand as man filled the earth (Gen 1:28). God's **presence** was there, walking in the garden (Gen 2:8; 3:8). The verb used in Gen 3:8 means 'to walk back and forth' and is also used to describe God's presence in the Tabernacle (Lev 26:12; Deut 23:14-15; 2 Sam 7:6-7). Adam's call to 'cultivate and keep' the garden uses the same terminology applied to the **priests** who are told to 'keep and guard' the tabernacle. There are **guarding cherubim** (Gen 3:24; Exodus 25:18-22). In the Tabernacle is an **arboreal lampstand** outside the Holy of Holies, which is modelled on the tree of life (Ex 25:31-36). The tabernacle was full of **garden imagery** that reflected Eden: wood-carved gourds and open flowers (1 Kings 6:18), pomegranates (1 Kings 7:20) and a garden area (Ps 52:8; Isaiah 60:13). The eschatological temple is a **source of water**, like the river that flowed out of Eden (Gen 2:10; Ezek 47:1-12; Rev 21:1-

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2). There were **precious stones** (Gen 2:12; Exodus 28:6-27; 1 Chron 29:2). Ezekiel portrays Eden as having been on a **mountain** (28:14-16), as was Israel's temple (Ex 15:17) and as will be the end time temple (Ezek 40:21 43:12; Rev 21:10). There was an **Eastern facing entrance** (Gen 3:24; Ezek 40:6) and so on.

Beale argues that the whole story of the Bible revolves around the presence of God with His people and he depicts this right through:

- **Eden** – God walked with Adam and Eve (Gen 2:8; 3:8)
- **Tabernacle** – ‘Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.’ (Ex 25:8)
- **The Nation** – God dwells with his people, such that He can lead Moses by his presence (Exodus 13:21-22) and He promises that His presence will go with Moses and give him rest, making them distinctive from all other nations (Exodus 33:14-16). He also dwelt in the Ark, which was carried with the people (Ex 25:10-16; Num 35:5).
- **The Temple.** When Solomon completed his temple, God's presence filled it (1 Kings 8:10-11), Solomon declared ‘I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in forever’ (v12). But even in the midst of this, he knows that nothing can contain the presence of God, not even heaven and the highest heaven (v27) pointing to the day when God's presence would fill the entire earth.
- **Jesus.** Jesus embodied the presence of God. He said that if you have seen him, you have seen the Father (John 14:8), but also he identified his own body with the temple, the dwelling place of God (John 2:19) and he fulfilled duties that should have been done at the temple, for example healing, and the dispensing of forgiveness (Mark 2:5-12)
- **The Church.** The Church is the place where God's presence now dwells. We are a structure being built together into a dwelling place for God (Eph 2:20-22). See also 1 Cor 3:16-17. Incidentally, 1 Cor 3:12 picks up similar language to the description of the temple materials found in 1 Chronicles 29:2.
- **The New Jerusalem.** In Rev 21 we see the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven and the declaration that ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people’ (v2-4). Again, elements of the imagery mentioned above are picked up in Rev 21-22: precious jewels, river, garden and trees. Significantly there is no temple here because God Himself is the temple (21:22). So has been fulfilled the Old Testament promises:
 - ‘The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.’ (Hab 2:14)
 - ‘Then the LORD said “I have pardoned, according to your word. But truly as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD...”’ (Num 14:20-21)

This is where everything is heading. God's presence permeating all things, and people living in harmony with Him for eternity. God's plan for all time doesn't avoid the evil and brokenness in the world, but tackles it head on, defeating death and corruption eternally.

As John closes the book, he exhorts the readers to holiness and to endurance because Jesus is coming back. History is not meaningless, or out of God's control. He is working to bring it all to a glorious finale, in which He will be all in all.