

## **Dr. Dave Mathewson, Storyline of the Bible, Lecture 6**

What we want to do in this final lecture is two things, trace these five themes of the story throughout the remainder of the New Testament letters from Hebrews through to a couple of references in the Johannine letters. What I'm going to do, this will not be nearly as extensive as what we did with the Pauline epistles or with the gospels. I just want to give you enough examples in different portions of what are called the general epistles to demonstrate that again the theme or the story and its five themes are either assumed or they explicitly surface in several sections of the general epistles in service of the author's purpose. Obviously the authors can emphasize different parts of the theme or story depending on the purpose for which they are writing or needs they are addressing. Nonetheless when we put it all together we continue to see that these five main themes as part of this story all surface in different places throughout the general epistles. Then the second thing we will do is end by looking at how these themes climax in the final vision of Revelation as the finale of the story and the conclusion to the story. It emphasizes the not yet and the consummation of what is already inaugurated through Jesus and his church and his followers in the rest of the New Testament.

So let's look at what is known as the general epistles or the rest of the New Testament exclusive, for now, of Revelation. For example, let's take the theme of the people of God. One place where you find this expressed most clearly is in a text in 1 Peter and chapter 2 and verses 9 and 10. What I want you to note is the Old Testament language that applies to Israel as the people of God now gets applied to the church as the new people of God, the restored people of God. So Peter says in 1 Peter 2:9,10 "but you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy but now

you have received mercy.” So in applying this text to the church that Peter’s addressing he clearly conceives of them as the ultimate fulfillment of the promise of the restoration of God’s people. So language that originally refers to Israel now gets applied to the church as God’s people.

There are others texts that we could look at but one of the other themes closely related to people is covenant. God enters into a covenant relationship with his people. That is what establishes them as his people. The covenant formula, “I will be your God you will be my people.” The place that we probably most clearly see covenant language is found in the book of Hebrews. That actually takes up the language from Jeremiah chapter 31, and now sees it as getting fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ in his death as a sacrifice along the lines of the Old Testament sacrifices. Now Jesus’ death inaugurates the new covenant of Jeremiah chapter 31.

So here’s Hebrews chapter 8 starting with verse 8 and I’ll read through 13. Again much of this is a fairly extended quotation of Jeremiah 31. It says “God finds fault with them when he says: “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not like the covenant that I made with their ancestors, on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in my covenant, and so I had no concern for them, says the Lord. This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach one another or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” The theme of forgiveness of sins and then the last verse 13. “In speaking of ‘a new covenant’ he has made the first one obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear.” But the author goes on to demonstrate though that this new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah, which the

very fact that God spoke of and promised a new covenant suggests that the old covenant would be replaced and would no longer be in force. Now the author is clear in the remainder of the section that Jesus Christ's death and Jesus Christ as a new priest ministering in a heavenly temple clearly indicates the inauguration of this new covenant. So Hebrews in particular not only assumes, but clearly develops the theme of Jesus inaugurating Jeremiah's new covenant, that now brings salvation to the people.

Again I would suggest to that wherever the Holy Spirit is mentioned throughout the general letters, Hebrews up to the book of Revelation, wherever the Holy Spirit is mentioned once again like Paul it assumes the new covenant. The Holy Spirit from Ezekiel 37, being the gift of the new covenant or associated with the establishment of God's covenant. So the church, God's people, are seen as the true people of God in fulfillment of this theme. God enters into a new covenant. They are established by virtue of the establishment of the new covenant. They are constituted God's people by the establishment of the new covenant. He is their God; they will be his people.

Next, the theme of kingship, or Davidic rule. Starting with Hebrews 1:5. "For to which of the angels did God ever say you are my son, today I have begotten you? Or again I will be his father and he will be my son." That's language that comes out of Psalm chapter 2, a royal or Davidic Psalm and 2 Samuel 7 the Davidic covenant formula. Jesus Christ is clearly addressed as the son of David. This is probably already been anticipated up in the first couple of verses of chapter 1, particularly in verse 3. "He," referring to Jesus, God's son. "He is the reflection of God's glory. The exact imprint of God's very being." Perhaps suggesting the image of God language. "He sustains all things by his powerful word. When he made purifications for sins he sat down at the right hand of God on high or the majesty on high." This evokes Psalm 110. Clearly Jesus is seen as the one who fulfills the promise of a vice-regent, a Davidic king, who will rule over God's people but who will extend God's rule throughout the entire

creation, in fulfillment of Psalm 2, Psalm 110 and ultimately intention for the king who would sit on David's throne. So clearly Hebrews draws together language in chapter 1 already of both creation but also Davidic kingship.

You find that further in Hebrews 2:5-8. Which again has a fairly lengthy quotation out of Psalm 8, a Psalm we saw back in Ephesians 1. So the author of Hebrews says now "God did not subject the coming world about which we are speaking to the angels, but someone testified somewhere." i.e. the author of Psalm 8. "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels, you have crowned them with glory and honor, subjecting all things under their feet." And then the author in his commentary on this song goes on and says "In subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside of their control. As it is we do not yet see everything subject to them. But we do see Jesus who for a little while was made lower than angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering and death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."

So what is going on here, basically, the author seems to be saying Jesus Christ has inaugurated in this Psalm 8, which clearly, as we've already seen, Psalm 8 goes back to Creation. It's a Psalm about the original Creation. God creates humanity in his image to rule over creation. That has now begun to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. We already see Jesus, who now is already in the process of accomplishing our salvation and subjecting all things under his feet in anticipation of the time where this Psalm in fulfillment of God's intention for creation will find its ultimate expression. But notice, Jesus is the one who tastes death for everyone. Later on, he's described as the one who brings verse 10, "It is fitting that God, for whom, and through whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering." So Jesus, who fulfills Psalm 8, is the means by which we achieve our destiny of fulfilling God's intention in Psalm 8 of humanity ruling over all of creation.

So clearly the author of Hebrews sees Jesus Christ as the fulfillment both of the Davidic promises of a vice-regent, a King who would rule, but also ultimately connecting it back to Creation with a text like Psalm chapter 8. Our intention our destiny that was intended to be accomplished by Adam in Genesis 1 and 2 is now accomplished through Jesus Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith and our salvation.

To just give you a demonstration of another text, one that we've already read, that clearly talks in terms of kingship that now applies specifically to the people. We've already looked at 1 Peter 2:9-10 but to repeat verse 9 of 1 Peter 2: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood." Notice the language of kingdom or royalty: "a holy nation." Again, Israel's intention was to be both a kingdom and priesthood in fulfillment of God's intention for his people and ultimately creation, now that gets applied to God's people. Again, there are other texts that we can point to that connect Jesus, perhaps the fulfillment of the promises made to David, to the theme of ruling, but we'll look at that more explicitly when we get to Revelation 1 and 2.

So the three texts show the people of God, new covenant where God establishes a covenant relationship with his people, the theme of kingship expressed in the Davidic king, the vice-regent fulfilled in Christ, but also to spread throughout ruling the entire earth in fulfillment of Genesis 1 and 2. What about temple language or temple imagery? Again, 1 Peter 2 verses 4, 5 and 6 and verse 9 where they are called a royal priesthood, the people are called a royal priesthood. But back to 1 Peter 2:4-6, and what I want you to notice is how, like Paul and other New Testament authors, Peter uses temple language to apply to the people themselves, so that the restored temple is found in the people themselves, not a separate structure. So 1 Peter 2:4-6: "Come to him, a living stone to Jesus Christ, though rejected by mortals, yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, you yourselves are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For

it stands in Scripture: See I am laying in Zion, a stone, a cornerstone chosen precious, and whoever believes in him will be not put to shame.” So Peter seems to pick up on that idea of the church as a temple, a spiritual temple whose sacrifices are not the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament, but whose sacrifices now are sacrifices of praise and worship and obedience that are offered to Jesus Christ.

Hebrews chapter 10, to go back to the book of Hebrews again also picks up on this theme. Hebrews 10:19-22: “Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary, by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened up through the curtain that is through his flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed by pure water.” There’s a lot of that language that we could talk about what that might mean, but what I want you to look at is the fact this language again reflects temple imagery. This language of approaching God and approaching his presence, the language of priesthood, the language of being pure, and being sprinkled clean, and washed with pure water, all of that resonates with Old Testament language of the priesthood and the temple. So that once again, the author’s suggesting through Jesus Christ, a new temple has been established. We have immediate access to God’s presence. And, in fact, again the church itself is the temple where God’s presence resides.

So once again the theme of the people of God, where God has established a people in the fulfillment of his intention from creation to have a people, to enter into a covenant relationship. The new covenant has been established, God will be their God, they will be his people, the Davidic kingship has been established with the Davidic king, ruling from heaven over his people in fulfillment of the Old Testament promises, in fulfillment of the Psalms, he rules over all creation. God’s people themselves are a kingship and participate in this rule. The temple has been established. God’s dwelling is now with his people. His tabernacle temple

dwelling is now with his people, who are the true temple as opposed to a separate physical structure.

The last theme is land and creation. Again the theme of the land given to the people, given to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1 and 2, given to Israel as a place of blessing in God's presence, but then the promised restoration eventually of a new creation. All of that language crops up as well. Again I want to touch on just a handful of texts starting again with 1 Peter 1:3-4. And as I read this, I want you to notice again the inheritance land type of imagery. 1 Peter 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ! By His great mercy he has given us a new birth [which is creation language, or new creation language] into a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. [The inauguration of the new creation] and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you." So note again, not only the new creation language of new birth and resurrection, but also the inheritance, so that now the inheritance, the heavenly inheritance that we now enjoy is seen as the ultimate fulfillment of the promise of inheriting the land. What the land typified and pointed to was that, ultimately now, the blessings of salvation, and the new creation then have already been fulfilled and inaugurated in the person of Jesus Christ. That was 1 Peter 1:3-4.

A text that we haven't looked at yet except for John 1, that looks at the creation-land theme or more new creation theme from a different angle. 1 John 2:15-16: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world, for all that is in the world, the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride of riches," which some have often linked back with the original temptation, in Genesis chapter 3. "They come not from the Father but from the world and the world and its desires are passing away. Those who do the will of God live forever." In other words, here we see the de-creation theme. The present world is already passing away in anticipation of a new creation. And again, John does not use the new creation language explicitly here.

But he certainly uses the notion of a de-creation of the present earth; “the present world is already passing away” in anticipation of the inauguration in fulfillment of a new creation.

James chapter 1 in verse 18, to bring in another text that we haven’t looked at yet, chapter 1 in verse 18 “In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth so that we may become a kind of first fruits of his creation.” Notice the language of new birth, fruits, and creation combined in that one section. Again I think James is assuming that the new creation has been inaugurated. The text from the Old Testament prophets that referred to a new creation, a new birth, the fruitfulness that will spring up now is found in James’ statement that God has given us a new birth that we may become first fruits of his creation. The new creation has already been inaugurated by those who respond to the word in faith and obedience according to James chapter 1 and James chapter 2.

But probably the text that says more than any other text in the general epistles at least about the theme of the land and creation is Hebrews back in Hebrews chapter 3 and 4. And I don’t want to read this whole section but this in the context of the warnings that dot the literary landscape of Hebrews and in this section the author warns the readers, probably Jewish Christians, not to miss this rest, that is they have a rest available to them and the author clearly identifies that rest as we might say it as salvation in Christ Jesus. So he’s warning his readers don’t miss that and turn away from that. But what is intriguing is the way he does so, by comparing the author of Hebrews whoever that may be comparing his readers to the Old Testament people of God. In other words, he compares his readers to their ancestors who wandered in the wilderness up to the promise land. Yet if you remember this Old Testament story when God’s people after God rescued them from Egypt and the Exodus led them through the wilderness up to the Promised Land, they refused to go in, they refused to obey God’s promise and his command to go in, and because of disobedience they were not permitted to do so, until later Joshua would take them in. But notice that in Hebrews chapters 3



and 4 the author tells his readers don't miss this salvation rest that has now been provided by Jesus Christ. Do not miss this rest that comes in Christ, I take it that's what he means by rest. But notice how he links that back to the Old Testament, in chapter four in verse 2 he says, "for indeed the good news came to us, [the author of Hebrews and readers in the first century] just as to them [the Old Testament people of God] who wandered in the wilderness. But the message they heard did not benefit them because they were not united by faith with those who listen. For we who have believed enter that rest just as God has said." Clearly his readers can enter this rest which, if you read chapters 3 and 4, he clearly links salvation in Christ, with resting in Christ with trusting Christ for their salvation. Verse 10 again the idea of rest, "For those who enter God's rest also cease from their own labors," so resting and trusting in Christ not in one's own works and one's own labor. Verses 12 and 13, "Indeed the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joint from marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intention of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden but all stand naked and laid bare before the eyes before the one whom we must render an account." So it's the word of God that judges according to who enters this rest. So there's a promised rest available to the people of God determined by Jesus Christ himself. At times I wonder if the reference to the word of God is a living active sharper than a two-edged sword is meant to refer to Christ himself, although it could refer to the gospel or the word of God that is proclaimed. But clearly this is meant to judge as far as who enters that rest and the warning don't fall short of this rest, don't miss this rest that is inaugurated in Christ, this resting and trusting in Christ.

But I want you to know two things, notice how this is linked first of all to the Promised Land given to Israel. Verse 8 "For if Joshua had given them rest, [when he took them into the Promised Land] God would not speak later about another day." Psalm 95 that the author quotes seems to anticipate that there is still rest available. Now the author says if Joshua had given the people a final rest,

even though it was rest, if that was all there was, why was God still promising a rest much later in Psalm 95. The author of Hebrews is saying that rest is now available through Jesus Christ. So again the rest that the people enjoyed in the Promised Land that was given to them in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham is now ultimately fulfilled in resting in Jesus Christ and the salvation that he provides in Hebrews 3 and 4. Which is again why the people are told don't miss this rest that is still available to you through the person of Jesus Christ. So it's linked back to the Promised Land.

I take it that the rest that Christ provides is the ultimate fulfillment in the inauguration of the rest that was only typified and anticipated in the land of blessing in God's presence that was given to Israel. But notice how this rest is also connected all the way back into Creation. Genesis 2 and 3, "For we who have believed enter that rest, just as God said 'as in my anger I swore they shall not enter my rest,'" quoting Psalm 95, "Though his works were finished at the foundation of the world for in one place it speaks about the seventh day as followed and 'God rested on the seventh day from all his works.'" So notice how the author links this back to the creation narrative. So at the very least all of those other things going on here, the author sees the rest that can be experienced in Christ, the salvation that one participates in Christ that's described in the rest of Hebrews is the fulfillment of the Promised Land the rest that the people were to enjoy in the land of promise given to Israel, but ultimately the rest that was associated with the original creation back in Genesis chapters 2 and 3. Now that story reaches its climax in the rest that is now enjoyed in the person of Jesus Christ. So again ultimately the promise of land, the original creation, the promise of land to Israel reaches its fulfillment in resting in Christ and trusting in him for one's salvation.

So in conclusion to the general epistles, before we look at Revelation, the general epistles as well at times explicitly surface, but at other times just underneath the surface lies the assumption of this story and these five main themes

of land and creation, of temple, of people of God, of new covenant, and of kingship, Davidic kingship and rulership.

Now throughout the New Testament Paul's epistles, even back to the Gospels, Paul's epistles and the General Epistles that we went on a very brief and hurried tour of. We see that the emphasis is primarily on, has been on "the already" aspect the inaugurated aspect of the story. But there are plenty of hints scattered throughout Paul's letters and the rest of the New Testament of the "not yet" dimension, or the consummated dimension that is yet come. We saw that in connection for example with Paul's reference in Ephesians 1:10 that God's plan is that one day all things will be summed up in Christ all things in heaven and earth will find their rightful place in relationship to Christ.

But it's Revelation 21 and 22 that has the most detailed articulation of the consummation of the story. Here's the finale, here's the kind of conclusion to the story found in Revelation chapter 21 and 22. What I want to demonstrate in this section again is that virtually all of the five themes, as well as some other themes, all five themes that we've talked about clearly find their climax, and finale, in Revelation 21 and 22. So all of the threads of the story that keep emerging in other sections and intertwining now all come together in all of their glory and all their fullness in Revelation chapter 21 and 22 in this apocalyptic vision that John has. As we talk about this, it's clear that John goes all the way back to the Old Testament, the prophetic texts, as well as creation. But he also sees them in the light of the New Testament and how they have been fulfilled in Christ. But now they've reached their final fulfillment.

So, for example, we'll start with the theme of: people of God. This final vision of Revelation centers around, and in some respects, focuses on the consummated people of God. Starting with God's intention to create a people in Genesis 1 and 2, that now is fulfilled in God's choice of Israel as his people, his nation, and we saw in the New Testament now gets fulfilled in Christ and his church. It now finds it's ultimate expression in the vision of the people of God in

Revelation 21 and 22. For example, let me just point out some of the features of the theme of the people of God that pick up previous Old Testament texts. In Revelation chapter 21 and 22, we find the consummated people of God referred to as a bride. This is Old Testament language God's people, in the Old Testament, were frequently referred to as God's wife, bride, as a woman that God married and entered a relationship with, a covenant relationship. That raises the issue of covenants, that gets picked up in the New Testament, for example in Paul's letters where the church is the bride of Jesus Christ. But now in Revelation chapter 21:2, "and I saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Verse 9: "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues said to me 'Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.'" So clearly the marriage imagery now gets fulfilled ultimately in Revelation chapters 21 and 22. Notice two other features that occur that bring the redemptive history of God's dealing with his people together now in one place, that is, the City, again John is seeing a vision so I take it that we're to take this with seriousness as a symbolic description of what he sees but still the symbols and images come right out of the Old Testament. So John sees a city, which I would argue that what John sees is not a physical city, what it refers to is not primarily a physical city but much like what we saw in earlier New Testament texts where building and temple imagery refer to the people. What this city that John sees primarily refers to is the people themselves, what God sees is the perfected consummated people themselves. So in verse 12, this city has great, high walls, with twelve gates, and at the gates, twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. But the city also has foundations, And in chapter 21:14, "and the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on the foundations are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."

So, John sees the consummated perfected people of God consisting of both Old Testament Israel, but he seems to give primacy of place to the new people of

God, which is built on the foundation of the Apostles. But clearly he sees continuity between the Old Testament people of God and the New Testament people of God that now come together in John's vision of the perfected, consummated people of God.

There's other things we could say about this theme. Intriguingly, ultimately these people of God are a light to all the nations. In verses 23 and 24, "The city has no need of the sun or moon to shine, for the glory of the Lord is its light. The nations will walk by the light and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it." So now in fulfillment of God's intention for humanity to fill all of creation with God's glory, it now reaches its climax with all peoples coming to the New Jerusalem in response to its light. At the heart of the theme of the people of God, or related to it, is the theme of God's covenant. In Revelation 21:3, John hears a voice from the throne and it says: "See the dwelling of God is among his people. he will dwell with them, they will be his people, and God himself will be their God."

This section is one of the closest things we find in Revelation to an actual quotation of an Old Testament text without having the formula, this took place to fulfill what was written. The wording here is very close to Ezekiel chapter 37 verse 27 and the new covenant formula; where it says, you will be my people I will be your God." We saw that the new covenant was already fulfilled in Christ, and in his people, but now the new covenant reaches its climactic fulfillment in the consummated perfected people of God in a covenant relationship with God himself.

Here's where we get some closure to one of the themes that doesn't seem to emerge quite as clearly and that's the theme of land and creation. Chapter 21:1 in a sense provides a summary for understanding the rest of the section. In chapter 21:1, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth passed away and the sea was no more." That is clearly an almost "word-for-word" from Isaiah chapter 65 and the new creation text, which mention the heaven

and the earth, and goes back to Genesis chapter 1 and 2. So now in analogy to the first creation where God creates an environment, a land suitable for his people to live in where God will live in their midst, now in a new creative act in continuity with Genesis 1 and 2, in fulfillment of Isaiah chapter 65, now John sees the new creation emerging as a gift for the people; as a blessing given to the people. In fact, later on in verse 7, in kind of an exhortational conclusion to this vision of a new creation, verse 7 says: “Those who conquer will inherit these things.” Notice the language of “inheritance,” notice, as we said, is connected back with Abraham and his ancestors in Israel and inheriting the land, but now it says “Those who conquer will inherit these things,” what things? They will inherit this new creation and the new covenant described in Revelation 21:1-4.

To demonstrate that John goes back not only to Isaiah 65 but to the original creation is chapter 22 the first couple verses. “Then the angel showed me,” [so John’s having a vision and a common feature of apocalyptic visions was for a supernatural angelic being to take the person on a visionary tour so now the angel takes him and shows him something]. “The then angel showed me” (Revelation 22:1) “the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the lamb through the middles of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” Now notice all the features of new creation that actually come via Ezekiel 47. This much of Revelation 21 and 22 is modeled on Ezekiel’s vision in chapters 40-48. So this is clearly modeled on Ezekiel 47. But Ezekiel 47 itself goes back to Genesis 1 and 2. And John himself goes back to Genesis 1 and 2 with the clear reference to the tree of life which Ezekiel does not have. Ezekiel has a number of trees but only John here has the tree of life, a clear allusion to Genesis chapter 2 and the mention of the tree of life. So the idea of the water flowing from the garden back in Genesis 2 and all the fruitfulness, the tree of life, all this suggests that John envisions the new creation as a return to Eden. So that the long awaited fulfillment of the

intention of God for his creation in Genesis 1 and 2 of the land as a suitable environment, a place of blessing and life, a place where God's presence resides with his people that has now been fulfilled in the Edenic-like conditions of the new creation in Revelation 21 and 22.

This is kind of an aside but still related to the new creation and land motif, what about this mention in chapter 21:1 where the sea is no more? The author says, "I saw a new heavens and earth, for the first heaven and earth had passed away [in fulfillment of Isaiah 65] but then he adds, "and the sea was no more." You don't find that in Isaiah chapter 65. I've often wondered why John includes this as part of his vision of the new creation. This has troubled some people like my wife who likes the ocean. But I think we need to understand what John is doing with this image. The first thing to recognize is consistent with other Old Testament texts and consistent with apocalyptic literature that John realizes that the sea was often symbolic or emblematic of evil and chaos, that which was opposed to God's people, that which caused trouble for God's people. So by envisioning that the sea was no more I think John is simply saying everything in the new creation that opposed God's purpose that was chaotic and evil and caused trouble for God's people was removed. So John cannot only say the sea was no more but he's also going to say crying, pain and mourning are no more. Why because the sea is no more. The trouble of the new creation, chaos and evil have been removed. They are no more. So trouble, sorrow, mourning and pain are no more as well in chapter 21 verse 4.

But to push that a little bit further, I think John in addition to that, and in connection with that also is evoking another motif, and that is, where in the Old Testament do you find the notion of removal of water that poses a threat and hindrance to God's people keeping them from entering into their inheritance--the Exodus. In fact, it's the book of Isaiah that is most clearly resonates with the theme of the new exodus and all through the prophet Isaiah you find this theme of the disappearance of different bodies of water of the drying up of water. One of

the clearest examples of that is found in Isaiah is chapter 51 where the author says this in verses 9 and 10: “Awake, awake [referring to the restoration of Israel as a new exodus] he says, “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord! Awake, as in the days of old [as you did in the exodus]. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? 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 cross over?” Now what’s interesting is the connection of Rahab and the dragon which are chaotic beastly creatures of the sea. It was common in apocalyptic type literature and other literature to associate the sea as a place of chaos and evil with the beast or dragon type or beastly-serpent types figures. And what it is even more interesting is the Targum of Isaiah chapter 51, the Aramaic paraphrases of the Old Testament, the Targum of Isaiah chapter 51 identifies Rahab and the dragon as Pharaoh. So here in Isaiah chapter 51 the author has combined the exodus and the disappearing and drying up of the sea as the place of chaos and evil associated with the dragon and Rahab this dragon type, serpent type, beastly type figure. So that the first exodus was in a sense seen as a new creation where God overcame evil and chaos removing the threat of trouble and evil and chaos so that the redeemed people could walk cross over into their inheritance.

Now what John is doing is picking up on the exodus theme and saying in the same way God did the Red Sea in the first Exodus and in fulfillment of the anticipation of the new exodus in Isaiah 51 and other Isaiah texts, now in Revelation 21 God once again dries up the Red Sea of chaos, evil, distress and trouble that form a barrier for God’s people enjoying their land. God removes that, so that now God’s people can cross over into their inheritance in chapter 21 verse 7 their inheritance is the new creation. So again more is going on here than that John sees the new creation. It is clearly the end of a long story that goes all the way back to Genesis one and two. It weaves its way through the exodus and God’s establishing his people Israel in the land and now that finds its climax in the new creation of Revelation 21 and 22.



The first of two remaining themes is the theme of temple. The theme of temple is rather clear in Revelation 21 and 22, though John does something different with it. The fulfillment and establishment of a temple is already indicated in verse 3 which we just read in association with the new covenant. By the way in Ezekiel 37 where John gets the new covenant language Ezekiel connects the new covenant with the people of God and the temple. So likewise John says, “I heard a voice from the throne saying ‘See the dwelling of God is among mortals, he will dwell with them.’” That’s the verb of taking up residence used of God taking up residence in his temple. “God will dwell with them, they will be his people. God himself will be with them.” This is the covenant formula.

So, Revelation 21:3 clearly broadcasts God’s intention to restore his temple in fulfillment of the prophetic expectations of a renewed temple: Ezekiel 40-48. Now John sees that as being fulfilled yet the way that it happens is very different. Most Jewish apocalypses, what they all have in common, is that they all envision, consistent with the Old Testament prophetic vision, the restoration of the physical temple. Yet John is at odds with the prophetic texts. He would have also been at odds with the common Greco-Roman architecture of the city and the layout of the city, in that when John finally gets to the center of the city in chapter 21:22, John says, “And I saw no temple in the city...” So John’s city doesn’t have a temple. Why? He goes on to say, “Because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.” In other words, what the temple realizes and symbolizes is kind of a miniature Eden, and a snapshot of what God intended for the entire creation to be. That has now been realized. Now that sin and evil have been removed, now that there is a new creation, the very thing that necessitated a temple in the first place—that is sin and a world under the dominion of the powers of evil, now that that has been removed, there is no longer a need for a separate temple. So John says, unlike the Jewish and Old Testament visions and other apocalyptic visions of the future, unlike what he may have found in a traditional Greco-Roman city, now John doesn’t see a separate temple. Why? Because it is no longer needed, the

entire city is so infused with God's presence that a separate temple is no longer necessary and again sin and evil have been removed.

But John goes beyond that in that interestingly he takes temple imagery that there is still in a sense a temple. Yes, there is no separate temple, but there is still in a sense a temple because John takes the temple imagery from Ezekiel 40-48, that Ezekiel 40-48 was largely devoted to a description of a restored temple. Now John applies that to the city. So what gets measured in Revelation 21 and 22 is not the temple, as you find in Ezekiel, but what gets measured is the city itself. The city, which we said symbolizes the people, is now the temple. The entire city, which is the people, is a grand temple; where God now takes up residence, where God's presence is now found.

In other words, John is reflecting in consummated form basically what other New Testament authors were saying. That the people themselves were the temple, the people were being built up. Perhaps we can see Paul and Peter as looking at the process of building. Now the building is complete in Revelation 21 and 22, that John sees the consummated people-temple, and city-temple, as the place of God's presence. The fulfillment of God's intention to live with his people that goes back all the way to the Garden of Eden. In fact there is other features that suggest that this is the temple. Notice that when you read this, how many times gold plays a feature. You are familiar with streets of gold. But this city, the city in verse 18, is pure gold, there are streets of gold. Gold was one of the features of the Old Testament temple. Go back to Exodus 25 and 1 Kings 5-7. Again gold goes back all the way to creation, gold—one of the precious metals found in the Garden of Eden. So the fact that this city shimmers with gold suggests it is the temple, the dwelling place of God. In chapter 21:16, the city is shaped like a cube. The city lies four square: its length is the same as its width. That language comes out of the description of the Holy of Holies. Again this is not an architectural feature that John is trying to emphasize just for its own sake, but this repeats the description of the Holy of Holies back in 1 Kings. Its length and height and breadth were equal.

It's a cube shape. So now by depicting this city as cube shaped again all the temple imagery is now applied to the City of God.

The precious stones which were used in the building of the temple are now part of the city. So again, what is John saying? The true intention of God to dwell with his people in creation that was thwarted and ruined because of sin begins to be realized with the establishment of the temple. What that pointed to is ultimately realized not in a restoration in the physical temple, but like creation in Genesis 1 and 2, God is dwelling in the midst of his people in a new creation.

The final theme is kingship and rule, as it emerges in chapter 22 and verses 3 and 5. In the final descriptions of this city/temple, people/city/temple/new creation, John says, "Nothing accursed will be found there anymore but the throne of God and the lamb will be in it and his servants will worship them." Notice again the throne as an image of kingship and rulership. But then verse 5, "And there will be no more night, they (the people of God who live there) need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light. They will reign forever and ever." In fulfillment of Genesis 1 and 2, that his people would fill the earth with his glory and represent as his image bearers his rule and spread his rule throughout all creation. Now his people reign forever in a new creation.

So Revelation 21 and 22 brings us to the end of a long story, the climax of a long story of God's redemptive dealing with his people and all of creation. A story that begins in Genesis 1 and 2 where God creates a people to enter into a covenant relationship with, he gives them a land, creates a land and an environment for them to live in, and gives it to them as a place of blessing. God will dwell in their midst. Their mandate, God's intention for them is that they might as his image bearers, represent God's rule and spread his glory throughout all of creation. Yet that intention fails, so that the rest of the Bible is how God intends to fulfill His original intention, from Genesis 1 and 2. How will God restore his intention for a humanity that he lives in a covenant relationship with, that lives in a land, that place of blessing that God gives them, God dwells in their midst and humanity is

to rule over all of creation in spreading God's rule throughout all of creation! That story that winds its way through the Old and New Testament that sometimes has its stops and its starts, but that gets inaugurated in Jesus Christ and his people now finds its consummation in Revelation 21 and 22 with God dwelling his temple and tabernacle presence with his people, dwelling with his people in a new covenant relationship with him on a new earth in a new creation with humanity fulfilling the purpose of ruling over all of creation.

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