

# **Dr. David L. Mathewson, New Testament Theology,**

## **Session 14, The People of God in the New Testament, Part 2**

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his lecture series on New Testament Theology. This is session 14, The People of God in the New Testament, Part 2.

What I want to do now is look at the theme of the people of God as it gets developed in the rest of the New Testament.

We spent a little bit of time in the Gospels, and Jesus embodied Israel's destiny, purposes, and promises in himself, but also demonstrated his intention at the beginning of creating a community. We looked at Paul's letters and how he developed the theme of people of God in relation to the Old Testament and Old Testament Israel. Now, we want to look at other New Testament texts.

I want to start with 1 Peter 2, a text that we've already looked at. In 1 Peter 2, we've already seen that was important for the theme of temple, where the people of God themselves are members of or building blocks or building stones of a temple that God is building. But in chapter 2 and verse 9, Peter addresses his church this way.

Again, Peter is addressing Gentile Christians and Gentile churches in Asia Minor. And he says this about them, but you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into his wonderful light. First of all, we've seen that notion of God's people as his possession back in Deuteronomy and Exodus.

He redeems them out of Egypt because they are his loved ones, the ones that he loves. They are his chosen one. They are his special treasured possession.

But also note this language of you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. Note again that language of choosing or electing. So, the author's piling up a number of expressions that come out of the Old Testament.

But in Exodus chapter 19 and verse 6, I believe we've read this before as well. But in Exodus chapter 19, verse 6, we read the nation of Israel described this way. But I'll back up and read verse 5 because it has language that appears here in 1 Peter as well.

Now, if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations, you will be my treasured possession. All the whole earth is mine. You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

And these are the words you are to speak to the Israelites. So, the nation of Israel was to be not only God's treasured possession, but they were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. And so now we find Peter taking that language: you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, or a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, God's special possession.

All that language comes right out of Exodus chapter 19, but the language of chosen people also reflects other Old Testament texts. But the point is that Peter takes language referring to Israel and now applies it to the church, the new people of God, once more suggesting that they stand in continuity with the Old Testament Israel, that in some sense, they are a continuation of Old Testament Israel. They fulfill the purposes of and intention of Old Testament Israel as well.

We'll come back to that text in Exodus later on because we'll see that another passage in the New Testament appeals to that text as well in describing the people of God. Another important passage in the New Testament that helps us understand the language of the people of God is in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4. We spent a little bit of time with this passage, which is already connected with creation and land. In chapters 3 and 4 of Hebrews, we are in the midst of another of Hebrews warning passages, where the author warns the people not to commit the same mistake their ancestors did, who refused to enter the land and experience God's rest, and because of the rebellion, they were judged.

And now, the author warns his readers in the book of Hebrews that they also, like their ancestors, stand on the threshold of inheriting God's promises. They stand on the threshold of the fulfillment of God's promises. They, too, have the opportunity to enter God's rest, and basically, the author's words are, don't blow it like your ancestors did by failing to obey, by refusing to believe.

Now, this begins with the author quoting at length Psalm chapter 95, and Psalm 95 is a reference to, starting at verse 7, he says, so the Holy Spirit says, today if you hear his voice, today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as you did in the rebellion during the time of testing in the wilderness. And then verse 11 ends, still the author quoting Psalm 95, so I declared an oath in my anger, they shall never enter my rest. The author uses Psalm 95 to suggest that there's still a today available, and that rest is still available.

The rest that God intended Israel to enjoy in the promised land, the land that they were to enter, is still available. And he connects, he even connects it back to creation, the rest that God enjoyed at creation, and to the Sabbath rest. But now he

tells his people, starting with chapter 4 and verse 1, the author of Hebrews tells his people, his readers, therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.

Now, why do I mention this passage, which has to do with rest and entering the land? Because once again, I think it assumes a continuity between the new people of God and the people of God, Israel, in the Old Testament, under the Old Covenant. That just as a rest was available for them, now in fulfillment of those promises, and in fulfillment of what was to take place when Israel entered the land, now once more, God's people have a rest available to them. They are to be diligent in entering it, lest they commit the same mistake that their ancestors committed.

So, Hebrews 3 and 4 seem to assume a connection between the Old Testament people of God, who refused to enter the rest, the wilderness generation, and now the new people of God, who once more have that rest available to them. To quote the words of Charles Scobie in his book on biblical theology called *The Ways of God*, he says the church is the new people of God, to kind of summarize what we've seen in Paul's letters, what we've seen in Hebrews 3 and 4, and what Peter does with the theme of people of God. Scobie says the church is the new people of God because it has been brought into existence by God's unique and decisive act in the Christ event, that is, the death and resurrection of Christ.

But it is also in continuity with the Israel of Old Testament times. The church is the community of the New Covenant. The prerogatives of Israel are now the prerogatives of the church.

So, notice that out of this statement, we should probably read some of these texts that we've looked at, and we should probably read them in terms of both continuity and discontinuity. At one level, the church is the fulfillment of Israel and inherits its promises. Yet there's also discontinuity.

The church is renewed and reconstituted, the renewed and reconstituted eschatological people of God. So, we probably should see elements of both continuity and discontinuity and not squash either of those perspectives. One of the clearest indicators of that is, I think, the Ephesians chapter 2 text that, again, we've looked at a number of times, but we'll look at it again.

Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 11 through 22, where Paul describes the church as the unification of Jew and Gentile into one new humanity. But I want you to notice what he does with it. I'll start reading with verse 14, but if you remember, in verses 11 through 13 of Ephesians chapter 2, Paul describes Gentiles as those who are separated from the promises of God, as those who are strangers of the covenants of promises.

They're without God. That is, they do not share in Israel's promises. They do not participate in Israel's blessings.

They are outside of that and separate, but now they have been brought near. They once were far, and now they've been brought near through Jesus Christ. But notice the rest of the chapter then goes on to describe how through the death of Jesus Christ, he has brought peace to two alienated parties, Jew and Gentile, and now has united them into one new humanity, one new man, making peace.

Let me read this. I want you to notice some of the elements of both continuity and discontinuity, particularly. The continuity is found in the references to the citizenship of Israel. They were foreigners to the covenants without hope, without God.

Now, the assumption is that they are members of the citizenship of Israel. Now, they are participants in the covenants. Now, they do have hope along with Israel.

Now, they do have God through the person of Jesus Christ. Now, they have been brought near to Israel and its promises. Also, we've already noticed all the references and allusions to Isaiah throughout.

We don't have time to track them all down. Sometimes, you might look at a Bible that has footnotes or margins or look at a commentary that is attuned or sensitive to Old Testament references. Notice how many references from the Old Testament, especially Isaiah, occur throughout this section.

As we've said, the language of making peace far and near, making one new man, the language of newness, this all goes back to the book of Isaiah. So, there's clearly continuity. The rest, the uniting of Jew and Gentile into one new humanity, is a fulfillment of Isaiah's promises of restoring Israel to be the people of God.

But I want you to notice the language of discontinuity, too. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups, one Jew and Gentile, and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross by which he put to death their hostility.

He came and preached peace to you who are far away and peace to those who were near. This is another clear allusion to Isaiah, for through him, we both have access to the Father, the language of having access to the Father, and the temple from the Old Testament by one spirit. Now, what I want to draw attention to is in the midst of the continuity, that is, the references back to the Old Testament, the references to Israel's promises, the uniting of the two into one new body as a fulfillment of the restoration promises of Isaiah.

Note a couple of things. First of all, notice the creation language. The two are created into one new humanity.

And then notice, that's verse 15, but notice in verse 16, they are also brought together in one body and reconciled. Both of them are reconciled to God. So, notice this is more than just a continuity where you have the nation of Israel continuing into the New Testament with other people being gathered in. Although there's some truth to that, that's the continuity aspect.

But notice this new body is described as a new humanity and both of them need to be reconciled to God. It's not just that Gentiles are now reconciled to God, but now Jew and Gentile both are a new humanity created to be a new humanity, and both are now reconciled to God. So, to quote Charles Scobie again in his biblical theology, *The Ways of God*, he says that, describing the church, it is Israel insofar as it stands in continuity with the Old Testament people of God.

But it is new insofar as it is the eschatological community, the community of the new age that is now donned the nucleus of a new humanity. So again, I think that statement captures both the continuity and the discontinuity that we find in Ephesians chapter two, that yes, there's continuity, but there's still a new creation. There's a new humanity that gets reconciled to God.

There's something that takes place that was not there before. So again, to quote Scobie, it is Israel. The church is Israel, and he has Israel in quotations.

It's Israel insofar as it stands in continuity with the Old Testament people of God, but it is something new. It is new insofar as it is the eschatological community, the community of the new age that has now donned the nucleus of the new humanity. I again add the renewed, the reconstituted people of God, the unique people of God that have come about by a decisive act of Christ, his death, and his resurrection.

So, both continuity and discontinuity. We'll come back to that in a little bit as well. But now I want to move to and spend a little bit of time on the last book of the Bible, which is the book of Revelation.

And as we've seen, virtually every New Testament theme ends up in the book of Revelation. As I've already mentioned, actually two books, a book called *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* by Desmond Alexander, and then another book by William Dumbrell called *The End of the Beginning*. Interestingly, both of those books are biblical theologies, not just New Testament theologies, but biblical theologies.

And they begin with the book of Revelation. And they begin with 21 and 22, chapters 21 and 22 of Revelation, because they find all the major themes articulated and

developed and climaxed in those chapters. Then, they work back to note how those themes are developed.

Well, we're ending there. We're ending in the book of Revelation. But we'll talk more about chapters 21 and 22, but there are a couple of other sections to mention.

Revelation chapter 1 and verse 6 again. In Revelation chapter 1 and verse 6, right at the beginning of the book, the author signals and flags the theme of the people of God. People of God is an important theme that gets developed throughout the book of Revelation.

But chapter 1, verse 6 begins it and flags its importance. The author says, I'll back up and read the last bit of verse 5, to him who loves us, that is to Jesus Christ who loves us and has freed us from his blood and has made us to be a kingdom of priests, to serve his God and Father, to him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

In other words, John has taken the exact same text that 1 Peter did, that is, Exodus 19.6, where God refers to the nation of Israel as a kingdom of priests. Now John, like Peter, takes this text and refers it to his church, to the churches that he addresses. And clearly, verse 4 begins with John to the seven churches in the province of Asia, in Asia Minor, or modern day Turkey.

So, John is addressing predominantly Gentile churches. They may have some Jewish members in them, but predominantly Gentile churches. Now, he addresses them and describes them as Jesus Christ, making them a kingdom of priests.

In other words, just like we saw in 1 Peter, now the church is embodying and fulfilling the intentions and purposes of God for the nation of Israel of being a kingdom of priests, of mediating God's presence to the entire world and creation, of serving and worshiping God. So once more, we express continuity with Old Testament Israel. Perhaps the idea then is what Old Testament Israel was supposed to accomplish in being God's priests. Now, it is accomplished not by something that replaces it, but I will argue later that it is accomplished by renewed, restored, and reconstituted Israel.

That is, the people of God are made up of Jews and Gentiles. That is the church. So, chapter 1 and verse 6 already sort of set us up for what we might expect in the rest of the book.

The church, God's people, will be described in Old Testament language. Again, not just as convenient metaphors or packages to try to illuminate or describe something about the church, but I think suggesting that God's new people, made up of Jews and Gentiles, now carry out and fulfill God's intention as embodied in his people, Israel in the Old Testament. Another text that resonates with people of God imagery is

chapter 7, Revelation chapter 7. In chapter 7, I won't read the first part of chapter 7, but beginning with verse 4, I'll read verse 4, John says, then I heard the number of those who were sealed.

So, God's about to pour out his plagues, and before that, he will seal his people. And so, verse 4 begins, then I heard the number of those who were sealed, 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. And then verses 8, I'm sorry, verses 5 through 8, list the 12 tribes and the 12,000 people belonging to each of those tribes.

Now, without going into a lot of detail as to why this is the case, I am convinced that the 144,000 here probably should not be taken as referring to ethnic Israel or literally to the nation of Israel, although it's using the language of the numbering of Israel. But instead, I would suggest that we take this in the same way that we took Revelation chapter 1 in verse 6 with the allusion to Exodus 19.6. That is that this imagery of 144,000 is probably referring to the new people of God, to the church, the new assembly of God consisting of Jew and Gentile, which would include the seven churches that John is addressing, the seven churches in Asia. So, they are now the true people of God, symbolized by the counting of the 144,000.

Now, I think that number is probably primarily symbolic. Notice the number 12, 12 being the number of the people of God signified by the 12 tribes of Israel and now the 12 apostles. We'll see the 12 tribes and 12 apostles pop up again in the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21.

But the number 12 plays a key role in being symbolic of and emblematic of the people of God, again, based on the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles. And now what I think is happening is the author takes 12 times 12, 12 tribes and 12,000 in each, and perhaps this also reflects 12 tribes and 12 apostles, multiplies them to get 144, and then times 1,000 to signify this is the complete fulfillment of God's intention for Israel. Now, I think there are probably a couple of things going on here.

I won't go into a lot of detail, but the numbering of the 12 tribes and the references of the 12 tribes probably recall the restoration of the tribes of Israel as promised in Isaiah and as promised in Jeremiah and text Jeremiah 31, and then text like Ezekiel 36 and 37. So when we find here this reference to 144,000 and then the specific numbering of tribes of 12,000, I think this is John's way once more of applying language referring to Israel in the Old Testament now to the new people of God under the covenant. They are the true people of God.

And again, by referring to them as the numbering of 12 tribes, I think John is suggesting this is the restoration of Israel. The true people of God, consisting of Jews and Gentiles, are the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises of restored Israel. And again, that's also demonstrated by the proliferation of the number 12 in this passage.

The next section, too, that we've already looked at, but I simply need to summarize and repeat some of it because it's germane to the theme of the people of God, and that is the very next vision, the great multitude, starting in verse 9. Another reason for taking the 144,000 as probably a reference to the church, the true people of God, is that I think the 144,000 and the great multitude that could not be numbered are the same groups. The reason I say that is throughout the book of Revelation, you find this key theme that John hears something, and then he turns around and sees something, and it's the same thing. Go back to Revelation 5; we won't turn there, but John hears, one of the elders comes to him, and John hears the lion of the tribe of Judah.

But then, what does John see? He doesn't see a lion, and he sees a lamb appearing as slain. You couldn't have two different images, a lion and a lamb, referring to the same person. And that's what I think is going on here.

You could not have two more contrasting images, a numbered group and a group that could not be numbered. But John hears the 144,000; now it says in verse 9, I looked, and I saw a multitude that could not be numbered. I take it that I don't have time to argue in more detail, but I take it that these refer to the same group, just looked at from different perspectives.

But what is interesting is that we've already drawn attention to this numberless multitude, this multitude that cannot be numbered, probably also resonates with the Israelite and Jewish language. And that is, we've already connected it with the promises made to Abraham. As part of the Abrahamic covenant, if you recall, over and over again, God promised Abraham that his descendants would be so numerous that they could not be counted.

They would be more numerous than the stars of the sky and the sand of the sea so that no one could count them. So, I think here, when John refers to a saying that no one could number or no one could count, he's directly alluding back to the promises made to Abraham and suggesting that there's the fulfillment of Abraham's promises. But note that these are people who stand before the Lamb, and these are people from every nation, tribe, and language.

It is interesting that the promise of the seed, the promise of Abraham's numerous seed, is now finally fulfilled not in ethnically Jewish people but in a multitude made of people from every language, tribe, tongue, and nation, including Israel. So, what is interesting is in both the 144,000 and in the multitude that could not be numbered, John is alluding to Old Testament text for both of those that refer to the restoration of God's people or that refer to God's people, Israel. And now in Revelation chapter 7, John sees in the 144,000 and in the great multitude, John sees the fulfillment of the promises of restored Israel and the promises of a numerous innumerable



multitude of Abraham's seed in the end time people of God who now stand before the throne of God and worship him.

That brings us finally to Revelation 21. And let me just make a number of comments, or just a handful of comments actually, about Revelation 21 and what it says about the people of God. Once more, there are all kinds of things that could be said about this, and I won't read the text in its entirety, but only a couple of sections.

The first thing to be said is we've already noted the new covenant language in 21:3. What John is about to describe in Revelation 21 and 22 is the new Jerusalem people. I've already suggested that the new Jerusalem is probably symbolic of the people themselves. The new Jerusalem is the bride, but John has already told us earlier that the bride is the people.

So, the new Jerusalem probably symbolizes and is emblematic of the people of God. That's not to say there won't be a literal Jerusalem or city in the future. That's simply to say that here, John is primarily describing the people of God in verse 21, much like he was back in chapter 7. But now he describes them as Jerusalem, but before he describes them, he places it in the context of the new covenant in Revelation 21:3, where John says, and I heard a voice, and it says, look, the dwelling places, God's dwelling is among people.

He will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them. They're God.

It's sort of interesting that in chapter 21, verse 3, one key difference that you find between 21.3 and the Old Testament covenant formulas, especially Ezekiel 37, that John is alluding to here is in the Old Testament, the covenant formula, in the covenant formula, the word people was always singular. Whereas here, John has plural. Literally, it says God's dwelling place is among people or among humanity, and he will dwell with them.

They will be his people. That sounds odd in English, but if you wanted to bring out the plural, that would be the way to do it. Again, it's as if what John wants to make clear, the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises in the Old Testament to establish a covenant with people, so he will be their God, and they will be his people, is fulfilled in peoples.

That is, in people from every tribe and tongue and language and nation. So, the true people of God now in the new creation are made up not of ethnically Jewish people but now of people, including Jews, but people from every tribe, language, and nation. By the way, with chapter 21, we're clearly at the not-yet dimension of the people of God.

Two other interesting features is that the New Jerusalem includes the gates. The gates are identified with the tribes of Israel, alluding back to Ezekiel chapter 48, but John says, verse 12, the New Jerusalem had a great high wall with 12 gates, and with 12 angels at the gates, on the gates were written the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. But then notice the next one, verse 14, the wall of the city had 12 foundations, and on them were the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb.

So once more, John envisions, perhaps similar to what Paul sees in the already fulfillment in Ephesians 2, now John sees the not yet consummation of the people of God consisting of Jews and Gentiles. That is, there's the continuity between Israel, symbolized by the 12 gates with the 12 names of the tribes of Israel, but then the church symbolized by the apostles of the Lamb's names who are on the foundation. So, note again that the Old Testament language is now being applied to the consummated new people of God.

One should also note the language here of the nuptial imagery or the marriage imagery or husband wife imagery. John is told in verse 9 that one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. In other words, once more, in the same way that Paul articulated the already aspect, the church is already the bride of the Lamb, the bride of Christ in Ephesians chapter 5. Now, we see the consummated fulfillment of that.

We find the consummation of the marriage relationship where now John is about to see the wife, the bride of the Lamb. So once more, taking language, especially found in Isaiah of God's relationship with Israel conceived of as a husband's relationship to his wife, now ultimately fulfilled in the new people of God, already in Paul's depiction of the people of God as a bride, but now the not yet, the consummated relationship of God's people consisting of Jew and Gentile in a new people of God in relationship to the Lamb. Now, let me say in conclusion, let me simply say and summarize a number of points related to the theme of people of God.

First of all, I suggested to you that we should see the theme of people of God developing along the lines of continuity and discontinuity. There's continuity in that the new people of God stand in relationship to the Old Testament people of God. The promises of restoration are fulfilled in the New Testament, people of God.

The new covenant relationship promised to Israel is established, ratified, and fulfilled in the covenant people of God. The vine and the branches, the sheep that were to be gathered, are now fulfilled in the new covenant people of God. All the promises get fulfilled first of all in the person of Jesus Christ.

So, there is continuity, but there is also discontinuity in that, as we've seen, this is a renewed people of God. The Jew and Gentile come together in a new creative act to become a new humanity. They are both reconciled to God.

There is a newness there that suggests a measure of discontinuity as well. So, when we look at it, as we said, there are different schemes for understanding or attempting to understand the relationship of the Old Testament people of God, Israel, to the New Testament people of God. We saw that classically, dispensationalism was emphasized more the discontinuity, although that's changed a little bit with more progressive dispensational movements.

Historically and classically, dispensationalism advocated a fairly extreme amount of discontinuity. That is, Israel was an earthly people of God, a physical ethnic people of God. The church is a spiritual people of God centered around Christ.

God's promises that he made to Israel physically, ethnically, and nationally will be fulfilled in them, not in the church. The church is sort of an interim people of God until God gathers his people, Israel, again in the future and establishes his promises with them. So classically, dispensationalism has emphasized the discontinuity side of the spectrum, whereas more covenantal approaches have tended to emphasize more continuity, that there is only one people of God, beginning with Abraham and extending through to the new creation.

In fact, I heard one speaker once describe Genesis chapter 12 as the beginning of the church when God calls Abraham. So, some approaches especially approaches known as covenant theology, have tended to stress more continuity. We also mentioned what's often known as replacement theology, which could also be placed in the category of discontinuity.

Replacement theology says the promises made to Israel are now fulfilled exclusively in the church that replaces them. So, the church asserts Israel's role, in a sense, I guess the church replaces Israel as the entity that now fulfills all of Israel's promises that Israel failed to achieve. But in contrast to that, again, I would suggest that we need to stress both the discontinuity and the continuity between Israel and the church.

Again, to quote from Charles Scobie in his biblical theology, *The Ways of Our God*, he says the church does not replace the Israel of the Old Testament times. It is Israel, but Israel renewed and reconstituted as the eschatological people of God. And I find that, I think, a helpful summary of how we should understand the people of God as it develops from the Old Testament into the New Testament.

So, the church is not to be seen as the replacement of Israel. The church is to be seen as Israel expanded, I would say, and reconstituted and renewed. Again, as Paul says, they're created into one new humanity.

Both are reconciled to God in this new act of being created as God's people through the death of Jesus Christ. So then, when we look at the theme of people of God, we begin with Adam and Eve, actually, as the first people with whom God enters into a relationship. God intends to dwell with them, but Adam and Eve fail, and because of sin, they are exiled.

Then Israel, starting with Abraham, actually, Abraham and the great nation Israel that would come about from him becomes, in a sense, the new Adam. How is God going to keep his promises to? How is God going to fulfill his intention for Adam and Eve, a first humanity? Remember, God can't just scrap his plan. God will bring it to completion.

He will do that. He will accomplish what Adam failed to do by creating new people of God by choosing Abraham and the great nation who follows from him. But Israel fared no better than Adam.

Israel also failed, and they were exiled from their land. They were expelled from their land. So, you have the prophets anticipating a time of restoration, a time of renewal of God's people when they will indeed fulfill God's intention for them.

But we find this when we get to the New Testament. We find this, first of all, fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the true Israel. Jesus Christ is the true seed of Abraham who embodies and brings to fulfillment all of God's promises and purposes through Israel.

And then, by virtue of belonging to Jesus Christ through faith, the church, God's people, also becomes the true people of God, the new people of God. So, instead of talking in terms of replacement theology, I would perhaps use the words expansion and renewal theology. What we find happening in Jesus and the church is an expansion of Israel to include Gentiles, but then also a renewal, a reconstitution of Israel into the new eschatological people of God.

So again, there's both the continuity and the discontinuity between the church and Israel. So, Jesus came then to gather the faithful of Israel, a remnant of Israel, his followers, and his disciples, who would respond to him in faith. And then that would be the basis for the new people of God that would expand to include Jew and Gentile.

And then we find the consummation of that in the international people of God, the trans-cultural people of God, Jew, and Gentile, consisting of people from every

language, tribe, and nation, dwelling in covenant relationship with God in a new creation in Revelation 21 and 22. Now, let me draw just a couple of implications from this, from what we've seen with the development of the theme of people of God, particularly in the New Testament, but starting in the Old. First of all, the church, an understanding of the church as the people of God, an understanding of the theology of God's people should provide a corrective to especially our American individualism or any culture that surprises and stresses the individual.

And at least the American culture that I'm a part of seems to wallow in individualism. Everything is geared to the individual, to my rights, or who I am as an individual, or what I deserve as an individual. I turn on the TV, and all the commercials cater to my individualism.

But an understanding of the church as God's people demonstrates that individualism was never God's plan, that God's plan for his people has always been a corporate identity, and that God's plan for his people has always been the creation of a church. If you go back and read the section of Ephesians before verses 11 through 22, it talks about the fact that I have been raised with Christ and seated in the heavenlies. I've been saved by grace apart from works.

But then 11 through 22 go on and demonstrate, but that means I've been incorporated into this new humanity, this new body, this people of God, the church. So, God's intention for me is never to live out life as an individual, but part of being saved, if I can use that language, part of experiencing salvation, the blessings of the new covenant, entering into a covenant relationship through Jesus Christ, is belonging to the new people of God, belonging to a new community. And I can't. Personally, I can't think of a better motivation for being part of a church, attending church, and being involved in church than a study of a clear understanding of a biblical theology of the people of God.

From beginning to end, God's intention is to create a community so that he will be our people, and we will. He will be our God, and we will be his people. Again, if not the dominant theme, it seems to me one of the most significant themes in the Old and New Testament is that God is creating a people so that he can be our God, and we will be his people and respond in service, and praise, and gratitude to what God has done for us. So, an understanding of the people of God provides a corrective to our individualism.

An understanding of the theology of people of God, I think, is also a motivation for mission. When we understand God's intention to create a people, to create a new humanity consisting of people from every tribe, language, and tongue, and people, that then becomes a motivation for the mission. Not just that we have a lot of people who are lost and need a savior.

Yes, that's true. But that God is all about, God is all about creating a people, looking for a people who will be his people, and he can be their God, so I can't think of a greater motivation for the mission than an understanding of biblical theology of people of God.

And if Revelation 12:1 ends with transcultural people, people from every tribe, language, and nation, in a new covenant relationship with God, then we should be moving towards that goal. We should be involved in a mission, participating in a mission that is meant to bring about that, and to be involved in that. And third, and finally, is what does this have to say about the nation, the modern-day state or nation of Israel? Again, I don't want to go into a lot of detail about this because there's obviously a number of different perspectives, and there's often been a lot of controversy centered around how we are to view the modern-day state of Israel. Is this the fulfillment of biblical prophecy? I just recently spent some time in Israel, just about a month or so ago, and a number of people reminding everyone of what happened back in 1948 when Israel was re-established as a nation, and raising the question, even some answering in the affirmative, is this the fulfillment of biblical prophecy? Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah anticipate the restoration of God's people.

And what does that have to do with how we view modern-day Israel or the modern state of Israel today? Again, there's a lot that could be said, and I don't want to get mired down in too much detail, but let me just say a couple of things. First of all, I'm not sure that the modern-day state of Israel has anything to do with the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. I do think it's a testimony to God's faithfulness and his continuing love for his people, but I'm not sure it's necessarily the fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

When I read Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, God himself will gather his people. It seems to me not probably in some political act in history, but when God returns to establish his kingdom and new creation, he himself, as I read the prophetic text, gathers his people, renews them, and restores them, and brings them together as his people, and establishes a new covenant relationship with them. Second, when I look at the New Testament, when I look at the broader canon, what I find then is that the fulfillment of the promises of a restored people, the fulfillment of the promises of a renewed people of God, then take place not in a national, ethnic Israel, but now first of all in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ first brings the promises to fulfillment, Jesus himself being the true Israel, Jesus himself fulfilling Israel's promises, and then by extension those who belong to him. So ultimately, the promises of restoration find themselves taking place when I read the New Testament, not in the reestablishment of the nation of Israel in history, or in some other time period, but primarily in the renewal of, the reconstitution of, the creation of a new people of God, centered around the person of Jesus Christ. So having said that, again, I am quite happy to say and think that the

modern-day existence of Israel, perhaps even some might say being miraculous, at the very least, does show God's faithfulness to his people Israel, show his love for them, and his continuing faithfulness to them.

But once more, when I read the New Testament carefully, who are the true people of God? Who are the true seed of Abraham? It's those who are in Christ Jesus. And I take it that when I read texts like Romans chapter 11, I think in Romans chapter 11, Paul does see a future for national Israel, or ethnically for Israel as God's people. But I would suggest to you that the way they become God's people is the way that anyone else does, Jew or Gentile, and that is through faith in Jesus Christ.

And through faith in Jesus Christ, they are incorporated into the true people of God. And they experience the blessings of the new covenant. They become God's people.

And again, we'll experience the culmination of that in the new creation of Revelation chapter 21. So again, there's much more that could be said, but in my opinion, modern-day Israel is not necessarily a fulfillment of any biblical prophecy. Again, I find fulfillment in Christ and the new people that he creates.

But I do find in light of, I think, Old Testament prophetic texts and in light of what Paul says in texts like Romans 11, that there is a future for Israel, but it will not be a separate one over here, that they get something or God deals with them in a way that he does with no one else. But instead, Israel, too, will find the fulfillment of their promises. They, too, will be restored and renewed.

They, too, will find fulfillment in God's intention when they come to faith in Jesus Christ. When they experience the fulfillment of God's promises, they are grafted back into the true people of God, centered around faith in Jesus Christ. So, the church, I find the church then as a community of a called people, called by God to serve him.

This could be the last point I think that I would make, which is a biblical understanding of the church should engender humility. That is, as I look at God forming a people, the church is a community that has been called out by God to serve him. God is the one who takes the initiative to choose his people, to call out his people, to create a new people, so that the church exists only by God's grace and initiative.

The church, much like we find the nation of Israel in texts like Deuteronomy, does not exist because of its stature or because it is greater than any other people. And we need to recall that. The church is a community called out by God's grace to serve him and to worship him.

And it exists only by God's grace and initiative. So again, to summarize the biblical-theological theme of the church, I see the biblical-theological theme of people of

God, especially the New Testament theology of people of God. It goes all the way back to the first creation, with Adam and Eve as the first humanity that now gets picked up and begins to be fulfilled, with God calling forth and creating new people through Abraham and the nation of Israel.

But because of sinfulness, Israel repeats the same pattern that Adam and Eve did and they end up in exile. But God's promises will still stand and God's promises get fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. So, Jesus Christ now becomes the true Israel, the true people of God.

By extension, his followers, Jesus, come to create a nucleus of people, a new people who will center around him and respond to him in faith and obedience. And this new people of God shares in the already but not yet dimension. The new people of God have already been established and created, but they still await their consummated existence in the new creation where people from every language, tribe, and tongue and people now become God's people, and he becomes their God in a new covenant relationship in a renewed and restored creation.

Now, the next two themes that we'll look at are also related to people of God. The next time that we meet together, we'll talk a little bit about the image of God, which is related to the people of God from Genesis chapter one. We'll also begin to talk about the theme of the kingdom of God.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his lecture series on New Testament Theology. This is session 14, The People of God in the New Testament, Part 2.