

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Lecture 28, Revelation 21, The New Creation and the Bride, New Jerusalem

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is session 28, Revelation 21, The New Creation and the Bride, New Jerusalem.

With chapter 21 and verse 1 of Revelation, we begin, in a sense, a new phase of the book of Revelation, the final climactic vision.

Though we said 21:1 through 8 is sort of the setting at the end of the transition, sort of the setting for the introduction of the bride, New Jerusalem. In verse 9, chapter 21, verses 1 through 8, introduce us to the most important themes and ideas that will get developed in the rest of 21, 9 through 22, 5. So, the introduced themes provide the setting. Verse 1 then begins with a vision of a new creation.

Now that everything has been removed in a comprehensive scene of judgment, the new creation arrives. So that John begins, I'll read the first eight verses of chapter 21. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

For the first heaven and first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Now the dwelling of God is with humanity, and he will live with them.

They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

He who was seated on the throne said, I am making everything new. Then he said, Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true. He said to me, It is finished.

I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. To him who is thirsty, I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all of this, and I will be his God, and he will be my son.

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

Now, verse 1 then begins with an allusion back to the Old Testament. The primary text behind this phrase, I saw a new heavens and a new earth, is Isaiah chapter 65 and verse 17, where in the context of anticipation of God restoring his people from exile, but in a new creative act that even goes beyond their physical return from exile, but anticipating a new creative act.

In chapter 65, I'll start with verse 16: Whoever invokes a blessing in the land will do so by the God of truth. He who takes an oath in the land will swear by the God of truth, for the past troubles will be forgotten and hidden from your eyes. Verse 17: Behold, I will create a new heavens and a new earth.

The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But then it goes on and says, be glad and rejoice from what I am to create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem.

So this text provides the backdrop for the introduction of the new creation in verse 1, but also the holy city, New Jerusalem, in verse 2. So clearly verse 1 is, here is the final fulfillment of what Isaiah 65, 17 prophesied anticipated. Now John sees the new heavens and the new earth arrive. However, this probably also goes all the way back to Genesis 1 and verse 1, where, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

But we know from chapter 3 that this was ruined and harmed and thwarted and upset and where creation now is plunged into sin. So Isaiah chapter 65 probably anticipates a restoration of the original creative act. And so now John sees the new creation emerge.

So that God does not abandon his project after Genesis 3 when sin entered the world and brought death and destruction and sin and evil. God does not abandon his project, but instead, now, God will restore it, and God will transform it into a new creative act, Isaiah chapter 65, which is what John now sees. Note, too, that the first heaven and earth have passed away, probably a reference back to the final judgment in 20, where heaven, the sky, and the earth flee from the presence of the one seated on the throne.

And once more, we probably should not see this as strictly geographical and physical, but the earth as under the dominion of Satan and the beasts, the earth as a place they have harmed and ravaged, a place where God's people have been put to death, that has now been removed. And now, a new creation has emerged. But interestingly, too, if you go back to Isaiah chapter 65, we find that the new creation is not just geographical or physical there either, although that's true.

But the rest of Isaiah chapter 65 will talk about a place that is fruitful, talk about a place where there is complete justice, where no one harms, no one will any longer harm God's people, no one will take them into captivity, no one will destroy their crops, etc. So, the new creation here that John sees is not only physical and geographical but is to be seen in contrast to the rule and dominion of Satan over the first creation. Now, here is a new creation where justice will prevail, where righteousness will prevail, where peace will prevail, where all violence, bloodshed and oppression will now be removed.

Now, one question that arises is, are we to understand this as a brand new creation ex nihilo, that is a creation out of nothing, or is this a transformation and renewal? I would argue, based on the rest of the New Testament, and even perhaps based on Revelation, that we should see that there's both continuity and discontinuity between the new creation and the former creation. That is, notice the word new that is used here, which stresses the qualitative newness of this creation and this creative act over against the original creation. But we should probably see both continuity and discontinuity in that this is brand new, it is distinctly different from the original creation.

But at the same time, I wonder if we shouldn't see this as a transformation and renewal of the present creation, as opposed to destruction and starting over, that this creation is completely revamped, completely renewed, completely transformed. And that is symbolized to emphasize, again, that John wants to emphasize more the continuity between the present earth under the dominion and ravaging destructive influence of Satan and a new earth that is qualitatively different. To emphasize that, John uses the language of destruction.

The first earth fled from the throne, and no place was found. The first heaven and earth, now in chapter 21:1, has passed away. But this probably is meant to symbolize the renewal and transformation and complete revamping of this present creation in a completely new creative act, where it is stripped of all the destructive effects of sin and evil and death and the harm done by Satan and the beast under whose rule the earth labored.

Now it's been released from that, been transformed and renewed in a new creative act, and John now sees that. I think also what this suggests, verse 21:1, I think what it suggests about our eschatology and our understanding of end times and our destination is important. 21:1 reminds us that the ultimate goal of God's people, the ultimate destination of God's people is not heaven.

We often talk about going to heaven, and I can't wait to go to heaven, or one day we will be in heaven. And it's certainly true to talk about that like that. In fact, elsewhere, the New Testament seems to portray God's people.

In Revelation 15 and also 14, we seem to have a vision of God's people in heaven. But 21:1 unpacks that, and makes it clear that the final destination of God's people is not heaven, but it is on earth. I've often, I remember once I was asked to talk to a group of high schoolers, and the Sunday school teacher told me she was very distraught because none of them wanted to go to heaven, and she wanted me to talk about heaven.

So I began to talk with them, and I began to find out the problem was when they thought about heaven, they thought about the proverbial, and you've heard this image before, the proverbial being up in the clouds with harps and wearing white robes, and they didn't want to go there. And as I listened, frankly, I didn't want to go there either. I can't think of a more boring existence for God's people than to float on a cloud, some ephemeral disembodied existence playing harps and floating around in white robes.

What kind of existence is that? What kind of destiny is that? And that might seem crass to speak that way, but I don't think it is because the whole sweep of Scripture ending up in Revelation 21 does not present God's people as somehow attaining a heavenly disembodied spiritual type of existence. That was first, second, and third century Gnosticism. Instead, from the beginning, Genesis 1 and 2, God has created us to be physical beings living on a physical earth.

God does not now rescue us from that to some kind of ephemeral spiritual existence, but instead, God's intention is to restore us to the way he originally created us. And so, Revelation 21 ends a vision of the ultimate climax and goal of history, and God's redemptive intention for his people ends with us not floating around in the sky with harps and clouds, but instead, it lands us on a new physical earth. And having been raised in a physical resurrection in chapter 20, now God's people emerge on a physical creation, a new earth.

I heard one person once say, in response to the typical evangelistic tagline someone once told them, not knowing who they were talking to, ask them, if you die tonight, do you know that you would go to heaven? His response is, yes, I do, but I don't expect to stay there very long. And his response was consistent with Revelation 21. The primary destiny is not to go to heaven, at least if by heaven we mean some airy, ephemeral, disembodied existence.

Instead, clearly, our destiny is in line with God's original intention of creation in Genesis 1 and 2, and that is to bring us to the goal of a new creation. One interesting feature is the fact that John says that the sea is no more. I find that interesting why he would emphasize that the sea was no longer, especially because it's not found in Isaiah chapter 65.

And the mention of heavens and earth seems to be comprehensive enough. Why did he add that the sea was no more? Two things. First of all, I think because the sea, instead of just being a part of a tri-part reference to the earth, heavens, and sea, the sea is mentioned here because, first of all, the sea throughout Revelation has played a role of, back in chapter 20, it was a place of the dead.

It is also the place from which the first demonic beast, the sea monster, the beastly figure in chapter 13, rises, and the sea is also clearly associated with the abyss throughout Revelation. The beast comes out of the abyss in chapter 11, but then he comes out of the sea so that the sea carries connotations of evil, chaos, harm, and death. It's the place of the sea monster.

Back in the Old Testament, you find a serpent, or a dragon, or this monster associated with the sea as the place of evil and chaos. So, the reason then that the sea is removed is because it is emblematic of all the evil, pain, chaos, and disorder, and the evil of the first creation that was ruled over by the dragon and by the beasts who have come out of the abyss, who emerged from the sea. So, the sea has clear associations with chaos, evil, and death, and it's the home of the sea monster, which is inimical to and hostile to God's purposes and his people.

That's what's represented by the sea. Probably the sea, notice the fact that the sea is no more. Later on, in verse 4, John says that death, and mourning, and crying, and pain will be no more, because the old order has passed away.

So, the sea should also be seen as probably symbolic of the pain, mourning, and suffering in the first creation. So, now the sea is going to be removed. Why? Because the sea provided a barrier to the people's enjoyment of their full inheritance, of their full reward, and salvation.

Now it has been removed. The sea is symbolizing not a literal ocean or sea, but instead is symbolizing the evil, and chaos. It's the home of the sea monster, and a place of more, it's emblematic of mourning, and crying, the pain, and suffering of the first creation.

That's now been removed. But second, I think the sea, the removal of the sea here, carries, continues on the Exodus motif. That is, we've seen both God's judgment on a wicked, evil empire, the Roman Empire, as well as God's salvation being depicted as a new Exodus.

The plagues that God poured out on Rome and on the evil empires are seen in terms of the Exodus plagues in 8 and 9, and chapter 16. But also the saints are seen standing beside the sea of glass, singing the song of Moses in chapter 15. I think this is a further reference to the allusion to the Exodus motif.

That is, the sea here is the Red Sea. And if you go back to chapter 51 in verse 9, or I'm sorry, Isaiah chapter 51 in verse 9, remember that the sea, the Red Sea, was described as the sea which was the home of the chaos monster, of the sea monster. Interestingly, I said that the Aramaic translation of that text actually identifies the monster in Isaiah 51.9 as Pharaoh.

So, I think here, the sea is symbolically the Red Sea of chaos and evil, just as the original Red Sea in Isaiah 51.9 is associated with the sea of evil. In fact, elsewhere in Isaiah, elsewhere in Isaiah 40-66, you see this theme of drying up water as part of the Exodus motif. In fact, Isaiah 40-66, more than any other prophetic book, portrays God's future deliverance of his people as a new Exodus.

Part of that is texts like Isaiah 51.9, the sea, removal of the sea, and the Red Sea, which are emblematic of chaos, evil, and harm. It's inimical to God's people. It provides, as it did in the days of the Exodus, that it was a barrier for God's people to get over and into the promised land.

Now, once more, in fulfillment of Isaiah and the original Exodus event, we find that God dries up the eschatological Red Sea that, as symbolic of chaos and evil and harm and pain and suffering, is now dried up as a barrier to God's people being able to cross over and enter their promised land. Now, the eschatological Red Sea is dried up. John says that the sea is no more.

So, now the people can enter into their inheritance, into their promised land, which is the new creation, the new heavens and the new earth. So, I think the removal of the Red Sea is a further part of the Exodus motif. Verse 2 then introduces us to the second feature of Isaiah, chapter 65.

Not only does Isaiah anticipate a new creation, but also a new Jerusalem. We'll see what John does with that in a moment, but the restoration of Jerusalem, the restoration of the city of Jerusalem, played a key feature in both apocalyptic texts but also in the Old Testament. We already saw that in Isaiah chapter 65.

Isaiah chapter 54 also is an important text. We'll look at that later, but Isaiah chapter 54 and verses 11 and 12 anticipate the rebuilding or the restoration of the city of Jerusalem. So, now, John follows suit and he sees Jerusalem restored as part of the new creation.

We'll see in a moment what John does with it, but starting with verse 4, John shifts from a vision that is the new Jerusalem and on the new creation, John shifts from vision, which also he describes as a bride adorned for her husband, which goes back to chapter 19 and the wedding banquet imagery and the bride being prepared, and also anticipates 21:9, where we will be introduced to and find a description of the bride new Jerusalem. But here we find the new Jerusalem bride already mentioned

in verse 2. The New Jerusalem is coming out of heaven as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. We'll see that gets developed in more detail starting with 21:9. But in verse 3, the author now shifts to an audition where he hears a voice, and what the audition will do, I think, is basically interpret the first two verses.

It will tell us more about how we're to understand this new creation and this new Jerusalem bride. And it begins in verse 3 with a reference to the Old Testament covenant formula. In verse 3, the voice says, now the dwelling of God is with men; he will live with them, they will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

So this is sort of John's version of the Old Testament covenant formula that we find in Leviticus chapter 26 and verses 11 and 12, but also in Ezekiel chapter 37. Interestingly, in a text that he's followed in order, now chapter 37, John alludes to Ezekiel once again. And 37 and verse 27 in the context of the anticipation of the future return of Christ and the restoration of his people.

Now, at the end, the author says, I'll start with verse 26; I will make a covenant of peace with them. It will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers.

I will put my sanctuary among them forever. Notice God's dwelling will be with them, Revelation 21:3. And then my dwelling place will be with them. Again, Revelation 21:3, I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Then the nations will know that I, the Lord, make Israel holy. So John now envisions that the new covenant that Ezekiel anticipates has now been finally consummated and fulfilled in the new covenant relationship in Revelation 21.3. The difference is in both Leviticus 26 and Ezekiel 37, the anticipation is God would restore and would make a covenant with his restored people, Israel. Now the covenant is not with Israel alone, but includes all the nations.

So once more, you have the people of God as no longer only national Israel, but including Israel also expands to include people from every tribe and tongue and language. Now God makes in fulfillment of Ezekiel 37; God makes a new covenant with his people. It's possible we should also understand this in the context of the marriage relationship, understanding that the marriage could be seen as a sort of covenant.

Verse two introduces the bride as beautifully adorned, and now we can see this as the covenant or sort of the words of the covenant, the marriage covenant relationship now spoken in verse three. Another interesting feature, though, is that this is true of Leviticus 26 in relationship to the Tabernacle, but Ezekiel 37, if you recall, Ezekiel 37, the covenant relationship where God says in Ezekiel, I will make my

dwelling with you. Chapters 40 through 48 then describe that dwelling where Ezekiel has a vision of the end time restored temple that gets measured.

That is the text that will play a role starting with 21:9 in Revelation. So again, John follows the order of Revelation and the covenant formula, my dwelling will be with them. I will be their God.

They will be my people, anticipates the Tabernacle temple dwelling of God with his people that will be described in more detail in 21:9 through 22:5, where John describes in a vision the new Jerusalem temple in which God now will dwell with his people in fulfillment of Ezekiel 40 through 48. Verse four, just to summarize verse four, then further describing the significance of verses one and two, describe it in terms of language that comes right out of the Old Testament. Again, he will wipe away every tear from their eye, no more death, no more mourning that comes out of the book of Isaiah as well.

So John is drawing heavily on Old Testament texts, especially at this point Isaiah, to depict the final consummation. In fact, one commentary I read said sort of tongue-in-cheek, but there was a large amount of accuracy and seriousness in what he said. And that is, if you took away every Old Testament illusion in Revelation 21 and 22, you'd have almost nothing left.

And there's a lot of truth of that. John is drawing on Old Testament texts to construct his end-time vision, to interpret what he saw, his end-time vision to show that it is the consummation and the fulfillment of all of God's promises to his people in the Old Testament. Now, they reach their fulfillment in Revelation 21 and 22.

And now verse four, using Old Testament texts, demonstrates the significance of the new creation. That is, everything that characterized the old order is now stripped away. In other words, can you imagine a creation where can you imagine this world and this creation stripped of all the effects of sin and all the effects of evil and everything that harms us, everything that disappoints us, everything that causes us pain and suffering, suffering, everything that causes us emotional stress, completely stripped away.

That's what verse four envisions. When the author says that every tear will be removed from their eyes and wiped away, a rather touching emotional part of the vision, sometimes this has been interpreted to say this is sort of a final purging when we see all of our sinfulness. Now, this is a kind of final catharsis.

I don't think that's accurate at all, especially when you see it in light of its Old Testament background. But also here, the tears are the tears of the suffering and pain that were true of belonging to the first order. The suffering and tears of those who were subject to the rule of Satan and the beast.

The tears of those who suffered persecution and even death at the hands of this present world. But now they have passed away, and so the things that accompany that earth have also passed away. Pain and crying and death will now be no more.

In verse five, God finally speaks. In verse five, God says in kind of summarizing one through four, I am making everything new. What is significant is this is another allusion to Isaiah.

Isaiah chapter 43 verse 19, which intriguingly is also in the context of a new exodus. If you go back and read 43 19. So the new act is sort of a new act of a new exodus in bringing God's people to their inheritance, bringing God's people to their salvation.

So, putting us all together, God's people are seen as in bondage and slavery to the Roman Empire in Revelation to another godless, idolatrous, evil empire that oppresses them. In the act of plague exodus, like plague judgments in 8 and 9 and chapter 16 of Revelation, God begins to pour his judgment on the oppressive Roman Empire and the oppressive godless world. And then, in a new exodus, God now delivers them and rescues them from that evil nation and evil empire.

He also dries up the eschatological Red Sea of evil and chaos and pain and suffering that formed a barrier for the people. Now the people can cross over into their inheritance, their promised land, which is the new creation. So, one dominant way that John portrays our salvation is through the motif of a new exodus modeled on the first one.

Starting in verse 6, the author is once more going to draw together a number of Old Testament texts that further describe and interpret the significance of verses 1 and 2, the new creation and the new Jerusalem bride that John sees. Furthermore, he describes it by saying, first of all, verse 6, it is finished, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Now, this is significant.

This isn't just John repeating titles for the sake of repeating titles, but we saw that Alpha and Omega, beginning and the end, suggested that God stood at the beginning and the end of history. He existed before creation and at the end of creation. So now you see these titles are significant because as the one who stands at the beginning and end of creation, he is now able to bring his intention for creation to its final goal, to its consummation in a new creative act.

The sovereign God over all creation in chapter 1 and chapter 4, the beginning and the end, first and last, Alpha and Omega stands at the beginning and end of creation. Now, at the end of creation, brings it to its goal, brings it to its consummation. But notice also the rest of the language, the language of to the one who thirsts, I will give him water without cost comes right out of Isaiah chapter 55 and verse 1. And by the

way, it may be unintentional that John emphasized, or maybe we should read without cost in light of the rest of the book.

In contrast to the exorbitant cost of goods under the Roman empire back in chapter 6, in contrast to the ostentatious wealth and privileging the elite wealthy and the cargoes in chapter 18, the mention of cargoes that the merchants were rich off of, now by contrast you find, in contrast to the exploitative economy of Rome that often favored the rich, now you find salvation without cost available to God's people who enter the new creation. In verse 7, then, the mention of overcoming takes you back to Revelation 2 and 3. Here now, in other words, chapters 21 and 22 are held out as the promise and the reward for those in chapters 2 and 3 who overcome. That is by refusing to compromise, by maintaining their faithful witness, by refusing to follow the beast and worship his image, by refusing to be part of the godless idolatrous empire.

If they overcome in that way, then they will inherit chapters 21 and 22. Note the language of inheritance. If they overcome, they will inherit all this.

That word inherit was a common word in the Old Testament, especially in association with the promise to Abraham. I take it that chapter 21 is the final fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham that his people would inherit the land. Now they inherit the land, which is the new creation.

All this, it says, they will inherit all this. All what? Everything in 21 through these verses. That is the new creation, the new Jerusalem bride.

Now, they inherit this. That is in fulfillment of the promises of inheriting the land in the Old Testament, connected with Abraham. Now God's people, Jews, and Gentiles, participate in the promises to Abraham of inheriting the land.

Now, it is a new creation. The other thing they inherit in 2 Samuel 7, 14, just to draw another feature in verse 7, is they will also, he will be their God, and he will be my son. God says I will be your God; you will be my son.

That comes out of 2 Samuel 7:14, the Davidic covenant formula. What is interesting here is that it is not applied to David or to Jesus but to everyone, to all the people who inherit the new creation. In other words, I think the way we should understand it is, as the lion from the tribe of Judah, as the Messiah, the true son of David, we also share in the Davidic covenant formula, we also share in the promise made to David by virtue of belonging to Jesus Christ, the son of from the tribe of Judah, the lion from the tribe of Judah.

So now we have been introduced to the major themes, especially the new creation, the new Jerusalem bride. Its significance has been interpreted in light of Old

Testament text. And now, finally, in 21:9, we are introduced to the new Jerusalem bride that we saw back in verse 2. And so starting with chapter 21 and verse 9, we read this, one of the seven angels, and I said, this is kind of where we should have a break.

This is an introductory formula as we saw back in chapter 17, introducing the harlot Babylon. Now we see the bride, New Jerusalem. One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came to me and said, come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.

And he carried me away in the spirit to a mountain great and high and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a Jasper, clear as crystal. It had great and high walls, that is, the city had great and high walls and 12 gates and with 12 angels at the gates.

On the gates were written the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the north, three in the south and three in the west. The wall of the city had 12 foundations and on them were the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb.

The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates, and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia, which is about 1,500 miles in length and as wide and high as it is long.

He measured its walls, and it was 144 cubits thick by man's measurement, which is the measurement of an angel. The wall was made of jasper, and the city was of pure gold as pure as glass. I'll stop right there.

We'll continue reading that a little bit later on. John will continue to describe the makeup of the city and the architectural features of the city in terms of stone imagery. But what is intriguing with 21:9 and 10 as well, and I think this is significant for understanding how we read the New Jerusalem, how we understand the New Jerusalem, is I think we are introduced here to another example of John's hearing and seeing contrast.

Remember, we saw back in chapter 5 John heard the lion from the tribe of Judah who had overcome. What he sees, though, is a lamb. The same thing, but using different images.

We saw that in chapter 7, I think what John hears is 144,000. What he sees is an innumerable multitude.

Now, notice verse 9. What John hears is, come, I'm going to show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. What John sees in verse 10 is a New Jerusalem, a holy city. In other words, I think if we understand the bride of the Lamb as the people themselves, which we should, adding chapter 19, the wedding supper of the Lamb and those introduced, the bride has prepared herself.

And even in light of other New Testament texts, like Ephesians chapter 5, for example, an Old Testament text that portrayed Israel as the bride of Yahweh, as a wife. If we are to understand the bride of the Lamb as the people themselves, then here in 9 and 10, the bride seems to be equated with the New Jerusalem. John hears he's going to see the Bride of the Lamb.

What he sees in 10, and what he will see in the rest of the section, and what he will measure is the New Jerusalem. So, I take it that the New Jerusalem is meant as a symbol for the consummated, perfected people of God themselves. The New Jerusalem is the people.

Now, that does not mean that there will not be a city itself in the new creation or John could not have intended a city. That may very well be the case and is likely, but primarily, the city that John is about to describe is symbolic of the people of God themselves. Not an actual architectural description of the building of a literal physical city, though that could happen, could be the case.

But John's point more is going to be described the nature, to describe the nature of the people themselves, the consummated perfected people of God in the new creation themselves. So, the Bride New Jerusalem, throughout the rest of the text, I'll refer to it as the Bride New Jerusalem. Although I'm going to have to add something else in a moment too, as we'll see, and that is temple.

So the bride New Jerusalem temple as symbolic of the end time people themselves seems to be John's primary concern in chapter 21. What I want to focus on just briefly is, in verses 11 through 21, I want to focus on John's description of the New Jerusalem. But in chapter 11 through 21, to back up a little bit, verses 9 and 10 of chapter 21 are kind of the introduction to the vision.

Then, the rest of chapter 21 can be divided into two parts. One part, starting at verse 11 through 21, is the architectural features of the New Jerusalem, the makeup of the New Jerusalem in terms of its measurement, its precious stones, its building materials. And then starting with 22 and through the rest of the section, we find a description of the New Jerusalem in terms of its residents, in terms of who will be there.

So we'll look at that section later. But I want to start with verse 11 and just draw your attention to several important features in the architectural description and makeup

of the New Jerusalem. First of all, and this sort of encompasses most of 11 through 21, but especially 11, is that the New Jerusalem is clearly portrayed as a place of divine presence, clearly the place of God's presence with his people.

Notice how it begins in verse 11. It's shown with the glory of God. Its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel like jasper, clear as crystal.

Note the mention of the word jasper and clear as crystal. That is one of the stones that we saw back in chapter 4, further indicating that heaven has now merged with earth. This is the dwelling of God with his people.

This is the place of God's presence with his people, indicated by the jasper, which had a connection back to Revelation chapter 4 in the description of the one seated on the throne. But the description, though now, we said actually starting with chapter 21, the book of Ezekiel, and chapters 40 through 48, is going to play a dominant role. Because in 40 through 48, Ezekiel sees the new temple, a restored temple, and an angel measures it, measures it in detail, and gives the exact numerical measurements of the temple.

That is going to provide a model for Revelation chapters 21 and 22, Ezekiel 40 through 48. However, the thing lacking in Ezekiel 40 through 48 is a detailed description of the makeup of the city. Again, please recall the city and its makeup are symbolic of the people themselves, primarily in Revelation 21.

Instead, John goes to for this language of precious jewels and stones, and later on, the stones on the breastplate of the high priest, which is lacking in Ezekiel 40 through 48. Where does John get that, then? Well, he finds in other Old Testament texts, clear references to the restoration of Jerusalem in terms of precious stones, and probably in apocalyptic texts as well. If you read some of the accounts of the apocalyptic texts like 1 Enoch and elsewhere, the restoration of Jerusalem is sometimes described in terms of a shining like a stone or a precious stone or stones.

But John finds plenty of references in the Old Testament itself. One of those texts is Isaiah chapter 54. That shouldn't surprise us because Isaiah has played such an important role.

Isaiah 54 is a text that anticipates the restoration of God's people and the restoration of Jerusalem. Notice how Isaiah begins; he says, Oh afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted. That would be a reference to Israel or to Jerusalem in exile.

He says, Oh afflicted city, I will build with stones. I will build you with stones of turquoise and your foundations with sapphires. I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones.

Note how each part of the city, the battlements, the gates, and the foundations are equated with a certain precious stone. My point isn't to describe exactly what those stones were but simply to note that the restoration of Jerusalem was described in terms of precious stones. I think that is the model that John is drawing on here in verses 11 and down through verse 21 in describing the stones that make up the New Jerusalem.

And maybe we should see the stones as I think this is what we're supposed to do with the stones on the breastplate of the high priest on the foundations in 19 through 21. But I wonder if the precious stones are not meant to represent, not literally or not specifically, but represent members of the people of God themselves. Much like you find in Ephesians chapter two or 1 Peter two, where the members, the people of God themselves, are the building stones or the building blocks of the temple or the dwelling place of God.

Although we're going to see, I think the stones probably, as you often find in apocalyptic literature, the images don't only have one precise correspondence. They may evoke several ideas. Clearly, the stones suggest God's glory and reflect God's glory, but they also may represent the people themselves who now are the building blocks or make up the New Jerusalem bride temple, which is meant to symbolize the people of God.

But John draws on this Isaiah 54 text, which is in the context of the restoration of Jerusalem. But it's interesting what he does with it. Note how John seems to combine the people of Israel with the church as the new people of God, made up of people of every nation tribe, now into one people of God.

So, the 12 gates of the city in verse 12 and verse 13 have the names of the 12 tribes on them but note that the foundations are to be identified with the 12 apostles. Now, John does; there's been speculation, but John is not interested in telling us which apostle with which foundation, or he doesn't tell us which tribes of Israel go with which gates. He's not interested in that.

He's simply interested in the symbolic significance of that, in that now John sees the perfected, completed people of God that span God's redemptive-historical plan to include both the nation of Israel, God's people Israel, the faithful of Israel, and now his church, people from every tribe and language, founded on the apostles. The apostles is the foundation of the church, now centered around the Lamb in the final new consummated people of God, symbolized by a city consisting of foundations and gates. So now Israel, Old Testament Israel, and the New Testament church, now John sees as coming together in the consummated people of God.

Now by equating the gates, and we've seen this with the stones as well, but by equating the gates with the tribes of Israel, we actually see that already taking place

in Ezekiel 48, which John is probably drawing on here. Ezekiel 48, we find the tribes associated with the gates. We also find in the New Testament that we've already mentioned people associated with certain parts of a building or city, symbolizing the people of God.

Intriguingly, in Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 20-22, John equates the foundation of the temple of God, symbolizing the people of God. John equates the temple as built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and then Jesus is the cornerstone and all the rest being built up as part of this dwelling place of God. So, John once more has precedence in other New Testament writers of not only portraying the people as a building, as a city or temple, but also by portraying parts, symbolically portraying parts of the temple or building with members of the people of God.

Another interesting text is in the Dead Sea Scrolls, a group of scrolls found in caves above the Dead Sea that most scholars are convinced were produced by or at least valued by or kept by the community on the Dead Sea that we call the Qumran community or the Dead Sea community. And they're responsible for what we call the Dead Sea Scrolls. These scrolls are important because it sheds light on at least one branch of Judaism in the first century.

One interesting scroll is one of the commentaries on the book of Isaiah, which includes Isaiah chapter 54 and verses 11 and 12. And it's interesting when you read that text; the Qumran community interpreted Isaiah 54:11, and 12, the mention of the gates and the foundations being equated with precious stones and the battlements and the walls, etc., from Isaiah 54, 11, and 12.

The Qumran community explicitly interprets those symbolically as founding members of their community, such as the council of the community and the chief priests, etc. They take each part of Isaiah 54, the gates, the foundation, the battlements, etc., and they equate those precious stones with founding members of their own community. So, it's interesting John, whether he knew of that text or not, John now is doing something similar.

He finds in Isaiah chapter 54 an anticipation of an end-time restoration of Jerusalem, but much like the Qumran community did with it, John interprets it to refer to founding members of the community. That is, the gates are identified with the nations of Israel, the tribes of Israel. The foundation stones are equated with the twelve apostles, who now function as the foundation of the community.

So, John isn't doing anything strange or unique with Isaiah chapter 54, but is doing something that others have done in finding Isaiah 54 is now fulfilled in the founding of the community itself, and especially the founding members and those who are sort of the foundation of the city itself. Another interesting thing about John's reference here is notice that he says, although he doesn't tell us what tribe belongs

to which gate, it's interesting in verse 13; he says something that doesn't appear to be overly necessary at first. He says three gates were on the east, three in the north, three in the south, and three in the west.

And I wonder why does he go to the extent of suggesting what gates go in which direction? He could have left that out, perhaps. It's interesting though, when you go back to Ezekiel chapter 48 and verses 30 through 35, when Ezekiel sees and measures the outer and inner court to the temple, this is the order that he follows. He begins, I'm sorry, chapter 40.

In chapter 40 of Ezekiel, when Ezekiel measures the outer and inner courts of the temple, he begins in the east just as John does here, and then he measures the entrance on the north and then on the south. So, it appears that John is further alluding back to Ezekiel chapter 40 to demonstrate that this is nothing less than the dwelling of God. This is the fulfillment of Ezekiel's end-time temple.

So, the direction of the gates here are east, north, and south, reflecting the order in which Ezekiel measures the entrance into the court, the sides of the outer and inner court of the temple in Ezekiel chapter 40. In chapter 48, Ezekiel will actually mention the city, but he follows a different order, Ezekiel 48, 30 through 35. That's a text where Ezekiel measures the city, but it follows a different order.

But I think John's order here, east and then north and south, and finally west, follows the order of Ezekiel measuring the inner and outer court in Ezekiel chapter 40. Because once more, John wants to establish the fact that this is nothing less than the very dwelling place of God. This is the end time city slash temple.

So, John is not just seeing a New Jerusalem bride. The New Jerusalem bride now is also a temple. It is a dwelling place of God.

It is the final fulfillment of the end time temple anticipated in Ezekiel 40 through 48. The other place, though, is back to Isaiah 54, the other place where Isaiah 54 plays a role is down in verse 21, the 12 gates were 12 pearls. That seems to come out of Isaiah chapter 54.

And then the great sea of the city was pure gold like transparent glass. Why does John mention gold over and over again in the New Jerusalem? Because when you go back to texts like 1 Kings 5 through 7, gold played a crucial role in the construction of the temple. Almost everything was made of gold or overlaid with gold.

So, by having the streets of gold, by having the city appearing as gold, even by the measuring rod of gold in verse 15, John wants to emphasize once again this is the temple of God. This is the temple dwelling place of God. That is, the people

themselves are now the temple where God finally takes up residence in a new creation.

The act of measuring in verse 15 follows once more Ezekiel. Start back in Ezekiel 40 and read through the text and note how many times the act of measuring is mentioned by an angelic being. But whereas Ezekiel measures the temple, which John clearly draws on, interestingly, John may have another text in mind.

Zechariah 2, we find the measurement of not the temple but the city of Jerusalem. So, John may have Zechariah 2 in mind here because it's the New Jerusalem that's measured in chapter 21. But John has merged Jerusalem and temple imagery into one grand image to show that the New Jerusalem bride people are also now the temple where God dwells.

Let me say one more thing about two other features. We'll talk later about the measurements, but two other important features of the description of the makeup or the shape of the New Jerusalem. First of all, John tells us that the city lies four square.

There may be some other allusions to this. Interestingly, Babylon was described to some early historians as lying four square. So, this may be part of the contrast between 17 and 18, the harlot Babylon, which now is replaced with the New Jerusalem.

But you also note that the idea of something that was four square or square is also used in Ezekiel 40 through 48 to describe the temple. For example, chapter 42, verses 15 and 20, and chapter 45 and verse 2 describe the temple as a square. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of Ezekiel 40 through 48, other features of the temple, the altar, and the mercy seat are also described as square.

So, by describing the city as square this may be an example of John using an image that is evocative of more than one thing. He might want to describe Jerusalem as square because that was a way Babylon could be described to further draw out the contrast between Babylon, Rome in 17 and 18, and now the New Jerusalem bride. But also, by alluding to a feature, the square temple and the square, perhaps, altar and mercy seat of Ezekiel 40 through 48, this is another way of suggesting that the New Jerusalem bride is also the temple of God.

This is the fulfillment of Ezekiel's end-time temple where God now dwells with his people. The other aspect to draw attention to of the description is found in verse 16, where he says the city was laid out like a square, we've looked at that as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia, we'll talk about that measurement later, in length and as wide and high as it was long.

That language of being as wide and high as it was long reflects almost verbatim the language of 1 Kings chapter 6 and verse 20. Let me read that quickly. 1 Kings chapter 6 and verse 20, which is a description of Solomon's temple.

In 6:20 we read, starting with verse 19, he prepared the inner sanctuary within the temple to set the ark of the covenant of the Lord there. The inner sanctuary was 20 cubits long, 20 cubits wide, 20 cubits high. So that language of being the same in width and height and length, that reflects, I think, is a deliberate allusion back to 1 Kings 6.20 which describes the holy of holies in the temple, in Solomon's temple.

So that this is simply one more way that John wants to demonstrate that the new Jerusalem bride is nothing less than the temple of God, the very dwelling place of God. It is the fulfillment of Ezekiel's end time temple. It's the fulfillment of God's dwelling with his people in the form of a temple all throughout history, now reaches its climax in God dwelling in his temple people, in his new Jerusalem slash bride slash temple people.

Now, they are portrayed as the very dwelling place of God. In our next segment, we'll look at a couple of the other architectural features, some of the other stones, and the stone imagery in verses 19 and 20, and then finish up the description that takes us all the way through chapter 22 verse 5, finish up the description of the new Jerusalem bride temple.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is session 28, Revelation 21, The New Creation and the Bride, New Jerusalem.