

Dr. David L. Mathewson, New Testament Theology, Session 5, Creation, Land, Recreation 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 5, Creation, Land, Recreation in the New Testament, Part 2.

We have been looking at the New Testament development of the land, creation, and new creation theme.

To wrap up the discussion of Paul's letters, we looked at a number of larger texts and what they say about creation, new creation particularly, but a couple of notions to mention. One of them is the use of the term inheritance, which you especially find in the Pauline language. Inheritance is the language that is used in the Old Testament for inheriting the land.

Now, we find consistent use in the New Testament of inheriting Christ or the inheritance of salvation in Christ. In Colossians chapter one and verse 12, to go back to Colossians again, it is interesting that we find, again in the context of what Christ has done for his people and right before that section that we looked at where Christ is the image of the invisible God, he is the firstborn over all creation, he is responsible for the first creation and inaugurates a new creation, but before that we have in verse 12, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of the light. Now, this also utilizes Exodus-type imagery, as well as this and the next verse, rescuing us from the dominion of darkness and transferring us into the kingdom of his son, in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins.

So, this whole section here resonates with the Old Testament language of God redeeming his people in a new exodus and now bringing them to their inheritance. Although here, we find that the inheritance language is applied not to physically possessing land or the land now is applied to the inheritance that we have in the person of Jesus Christ, which is our salvation. So, in one sense, I wouldn't say the only sense, but at least in one sense, we find here at least the spiritual aspect of the possession of the land, and that is the inheritance of salvation, which it seemed to point to.

The blessings of salvation that it seemed to anticipate and point to that now get fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. As we said before, the imagery of land and creation and new creation have both physical and spiritual aspects to it. But I find it interesting that not only in Colossians 1:12, but in a number of other texts in the

Pauline literature and even elsewhere, you'll find inheritance language that seems to recall the language of inheriting the land now applied to the salvation that we inherit in Jesus Christ.

It is interesting that in one text, we find inheritance language applied to Christians, both Jew and Gentile, in the context of the promises made to Abraham. So this is Galatians chapter 3, starting in verse 26. You are sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. For you, all are one in Christ Jesus.

Now listen to this. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heir, according to the promise. Notice the language of heirs and the promise in association with Abraham, which I take it would include the land as well.

So once more, Paul seems to suggest that through Christ, all God's people inherit the promises, which would include the land. Now again, I take it that in the present form for Christians, that would be the blessings of salvation and of the new creation, resurrection, and life. But in the future inheriting what the land ultimately pointed to and that was that the land from the time of Jesus in his first century ministry that would expand and embrace the entire creation now finds its fulfillment in inheriting, God's people inheriting the new creation in Revelation chapter 21 and 22.

Just to point to a couple of other texts in Pauline literature before we look specifically at some other texts in the New Testament, and then we will end by looking at the book of Revelation, especially chapters 21 and 22. One passage that we already looked at is Romans chapter 8 and verses 19 through 21, where Paul anticipates the future redemption of all creation in a reversal of its subjection to sin. The subjection of the first creation to sin goes back to Genesis chapter 3. So, more creation language, more anticipation of a renewed restored creation in fulfillment of God's original intention in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. One very intriguing text is Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 11 and 22.

I won't read the entirety of this. I think we have already read a couple of these. We will return to chapter 2 of Ephesians in connection with our discussion of the temple as well.

The next theme we will deal with. But I am starting with Ephesians 2 in verse 11. Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised by those who call themselves circumcision.

That is a contrast between Gentiles and Jews. That is a circumcision done in the body by the hands of human beings. Remember that at that time, you were separate from Christ, excluded from the citizenship in Israel, and foreigner to the covenants of promise without hope and without God in the world.

But now, in Christ Jesus, you who were once far have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace who made the two one and destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace.

And in this one body to reconcile both of them, Jew and Gentile, 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 are near. For through him we both have access to the Father by the one Spirit.

Now, the only thing I want to say about this is that this text is latent, with allusions to the Old Testament, especially the book of Isaiah. And even the earlier verses, the first verses I read, particularly verse 12, you are separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope, without God, but now you who are far away have been brought near. Even that far and near language comes right out of the book of Isaiah.

More intriguingly, these texts that are alluded to here are texts dealing with the restoration of God's people back to the land. So again, I think Paul is demonstrating that now, ultimately, with the person of Jesus Christ, as the gospel spreads and begins to create a new humanity made of Jews and Gentiles, where Gentiles come to share in the promises that God made to Israel. And they do so by belonging, once more, by belonging to the person of Jesus Christ.

Hopefully, you begin to see a pattern in a lot of this, which is that most of the promises are not just as if now, all of a sudden, the church begins to start fulfilling the promises that were made in the Old Testament, but everything gets filtered through Christ. You'll notice that, first and foremost, in almost everything we've looked at so far, the Old Testament promises to find its fulfillment in Christ. And then they find their fulfillment in his people, Jew and Gentile, by virtue of them being joined to Christ.

We'll talk more about the Galatians passage that we looked at a moment ago in Galatians 3. But remember, at the very end of Galatians 3, Paul says, if you are in Christ, you are heirs of the promises. You are Abraham's seed and heirs of the promises. But if that's all we read, we would miss earlier that Jesus Christ is the seed of Abraham.

And it's by belonging to Christ that we become the seed of Abraham. We'll look at that text again, but the point is that these promises first find their fulfillment in Christ, and then we get them, so to speak, by virtue of being joined to Christ and belonging to Christ. So now, ultimately, the promises of the land we see are beginning to be fulfilled, at least in Ephesians 2, by virtue of Jew and Gentile coming together and inheriting the peace, the salvation, the reconciliation, the access to the Father that now God promises to His people.

Another key text is in 2 Corinthians 6 and verse 16. We looked at 2 Corinthians 5.17 in the reference to the new creation. However, in Chapters 6 and 16, the author quotes specifically from Old Testament texts, such as verses 17 and 18.

Therefore, let me back up and read verse 16. What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said, I will live with them and walk among them.

I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore, come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.

I will be a father to you, and you will be my son and daughter, says the Lord God Almighty. Especially in verse 16, I will live with them and walk among them. I will be their God and they will be my people.

Notice that this is actually a quotation from an Old Testament text. It's probably a combination of a couple of texts. One of them is Ezekiel chapter 37, which includes that new covenant formula.

Now, notice how we have touched on themes of the temple and the new covenant in this verse. But we are primarily concerned with the theme of creation and land. But it is intriguing that Paul can quote another Old Testament text that was in the context of God's people being restored to the land.

And it is now extending that blessing to both Jews and Gentiles. So, in the Old Testament, the new covenant that is referred to here, that I will be your God and they will be my people, is the language of the covenant, a theme that we will deal with later. But in Ezekiel, that is connected with the restoration of God's people to their land.

So, once more, it is as if Paul envisions the land expanding beyond the land of Palestine. Now, we must embrace the Jew and Gentile who now inherit what the land was pointing to, the blessings of salvation. In the rest of the New Testament, even outside of Paul's letters, we also find numerous, I think, at least allusions to or references to creation, new creation, or the land.

To give you just three examples in the literature between Paul's letters and when we get to the book of Revelation, which we will deal with in a moment. I will give you three brief examples in the rest of the New Testament, in James, chapter 1 and verse 18. When I read this, I simply wanted you to pay attention to the new creation language.

But James chapter 1 and verse 18 say this. I will back up to give a little bit of context. Verse 17: Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, and we might be the first fruit of his creation. So, in a sense, Paul seemed to be suggesting, or the author of James, I'm sorry, James is suggesting that our salvation is to be understood as a rebirth, a new birth, which is the first fruit or the beginning of a new creation. So, I'm convinced that James is deliberately using new creation language here.

Again, in an inaugurated way, the new creation has already been inaugurated by the fact that we have been given new birth. This may be similar to Paul's new life or sharing in Christ's resurrection, though James doesn't use that language. But certainly, he understands our salvation and our rebirth, receiving new life as the first fruit, the beginning of a new creation.

We find an interesting concept in 1 John 2, which is kind of the opposite side of a new creation. We often find in the New Testament the undoing of or the judgment of the first creation. And in 1 John 2 and verse 17.

1 John 2:17. Again, I'll back up and start reading verse 15. Notice again, this is placed in an ethical context.

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes, the boasting of what he has and does, come not from the Father but from the world.

The world and its desires are passing away. But the person who does the will of God lives forever. Again, it's difficult to tell whether the author, John, intended to give a specific allusion to the Old Testament.

But certainly, this idea of the present world passing away and that the person who pursues life under the will of God lives forever seems to reflect once more the life of the new creation. In contrast to the present creation, which is sort of undergoing a decreation and undoing in preparation for, or in contrast to, the life of the newly created order that God's people can share in. What I think is one of the most interesting passages in relation to understanding how we deal with the issue of the

land and its ultimate fulfillment is probably found in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4. Again, I won't read the entirety of this, but I do want to read it. Actually, I will start with chapter 4. Chapters 3 and 4 of Hebrews are part of one of the author's warning passages where, if you're familiar with Hebrews, over and over again, the author consistently warns his readers not to turn their backs on the gospel and on Jesus Christ and the salvation he promises in order to go back to the old covenant system of worship and life under Judaism apart from or without Jesus Christ.

The author warns them over and over about the consequences of doing that. One of those warnings is found in chapters 3 and 4. In chapters 3 and 4, the author places that warning in the context of the promises of the land given to Israel in the Old Testament. And as you look at this carefully, the author seems to think that the promise of rest in the land is still available to the people of God.

The people of God can actually participate in the promises of rest in the land from the Old Testament. So, let me read just a few of these verses. I'll start with verse 16 of chapter 3, and then I'll skip down and read a few verses of chapter 4—verse 16 of chapter 3 in Hebrews.

Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, those whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So, we see that they were not able to enter because of their unbelief. So, this is a bit of Old Testament history that the author says the people of Israel, who God led out of Egypt up to the land of Canaan, the promised land, did not go because of rebellion. They refused to go in, and they did not enjoy the rest of the land that God had promised them.

But now chapter 4 goes on and says, 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. For those who have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did the Israelites in the Old Testament, the message they heard was of no value to them because those who heard it did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed enter that rest.

Just as God said, So I declared an oath in my anger that they shall never enter my rest. A quote from Psalm 95. Which the author is developing here from Psalm 95.

We'll talk about that in just a moment. And again, the passage above says they will never enter my rest. Verse 6. It still remains that some will enter that rest.

And those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go into the land and enter that rest because of their disobedience. Therefore, God again set a certain day, calling it today, when a long time later, he spoke through David as was said

before Today, if you hear my voice, do not harden your hearts. Once again, a quotation from Psalm 95.

Verse 8. God would not have spoken later about another day if Joshua had given them rest. There remains then a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For anyone who enters, God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.

Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. Then, what follows next is that the author presents Jesus as the high priest where salvation is to be found. To put this all together, first of all, when you read chapters 3 and 4 of Hebrews, the author begins with Psalm 95.

In Psalm 95, which is written long after, long after that event where God led Israel out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, through the wilderness, up to the Promised Land, yet they rebelled. If you remember the story, they sent spies into the land, they came back, and they said, we can't do it; although God promised and commanded them to go in, they refused to believe, they refused to obey, and they were not permitted to enter the land. But later on, the author, now reading Psalm 95, reads that the rest of the land that God promised must still be available to some extent.

Even though God did bring Israel into the land, and they did settle, the author seems to be saying that they still anticipated a greater rest that was to come. And because of disobedience, the nation of Israel did not experience that rest in the land; that original generation did not experience the rest in the land that God had intended from creation. Notice how the author also connects this rest all the way back to creation.

So, the rest of the land is still available. Psalm 95, the author, by reading his Old Testament, by reading Psalm 95, says much later, why do we find David still promising a rest to the people of God? So, the author concludes, there must still be a rest available for the people of God to enter in fulfillment of Psalm 95. And in fulfillment of creation, the creation rest and the Sabbath rest, and even the rest in the land that God gave to Israel, there still is a greater rest available.

I want you to also notice chapter 4 and verse 1. Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you have been found to have fallen short. In my opinion, this is probably parallel to chapter 3, verse 14 of Hebrews. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly to the end and the confidence we have at first.

So, I take it that the rest are becoming partakers in Jesus Christ. The ultimate rest that the author of Hebrews does not want his readers to miss, the ultimate rest that he wants them to be diligent to enter and to cling to, is being a partaker in Jesus

Christ, participating in Jesus Christ and the salvation that he brings. Now, the emphasis here is probably mainly eschatological.

So, when he talks about being diligent in entering that rest, this may be referring primarily to what we read about in Revelation 21, the new creation and life in God's presence. But it certainly has an inaugurated aspect as well. That God's people can enter it now in advance of its ultimate manifestation.

So, to then summarize the evidence of Hebrews chapters 3 and 4, I think the author is suggesting, at least at this point, that the promise of rest in the land from the Old Testament now at this point finds its fulfillment in the salvation that God's people participate in Christ. Now again, we said the promises of land and creation have both physical and spiritual aspects. This does not suggest that, therefore, there's no physical reality to it, and it has nothing to do with physical land or creation.

It's only at this point that the author focuses on the salvation in Christ that the land and creation ultimately point to the spiritual reality that the promise of the land points to, which now finds its fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. So, most of, except perhaps for Hebrews chapters 3 and 4 and the text from Romans chapter 8 and maybe a couple of other passages, most of the text in the New Testament that we've looked at dealing with themes of new creation or creation or land have focused on the already aspect. That is, in the person of Jesus Christ, the promises of the inaugurated new creation have now been fulfilled and have become a reality.

But we've said the New Testament usually develops these themes within the structure of its already not yet tension. That is the fact that these promises through Christ and his people now find their fulfillment in inaugurated form, but those anticipate the final consummation. And to that, I want to move.

And that brings us then to Revelation chapters 21 and 22. Now, there are other texts we could probably deal with in the New Testament, but I think I've touched on some of the major texts, and now I want to jump ahead to a text that is probably one that we'll return to very, very frequently in the same way that Genesis chapters 1 through 3 developed or at least gave rise to the dominant themes that get developed through the New Testament. So, Revelation 21 and 22 seem to culminate them and bring them to their intended goal and conclusion.

So Revelation 21 and 22. In this section, John sees a vision of the ultimate goal of redemptive history, which is a new creation, and more importantly than that, God's people living in God's presence on this new creation as the climax of as the ultimate goal, and as the intention of God's plan of redemption, and God's plan for the whole creation from Genesis 1 and 2. Now, before we look in more detail at Revelation 21 and 22, and again, as I said, we'll look at it in some detail in several different contexts, but the starting point for understanding this, I think, is to go back to

chapter 4 and 5 of Revelation, and especially chapter 4, where in chapter 4, God is praised because he is the creator of all things. And you find this, particularly in the hymns.

We get all caught up in the vision that begins chapter 4, or any section of Revelation, but often in Revelation, the speeches that are said or the hymns that are sung are usually meant to interpret what's going on in the vision. At the very end of chapter 4, we read the account of these 24 elders and four living creatures. I'm not interested in trying to solve who or what those are at this point, but what's more important is what they do.

In verse 8, it says each of the four living creatures had 6 wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night, they never stopped saying, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come. So, first of all, God is praised as the sovereign, almighty one, who is sovereign and eternal in relationship to all things, who was and is and is to come.

But then it goes on and says, whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne, the one who lives forever and ever, then the 24 elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and they worship him who lives forever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne, and they say, in verse 11, you are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created, and they have their being. So God is worshipped as the sovereign ruler of creation and as the creator of all things.

Reflecting Genesis 1 and 2, I think. But in my opinion, chapter 4, praising God as the sovereign ruler of all things and the creator of all things, in the context of the one who was and is and is to come, that is to come anticipates the fact that God can also bring about a new creative act. God is the creator of all things, and he's worthy of worship; he's worthy to receive honor and glory and power because he created all things; all things owe their existence to the almighty God who was and is and is to come.

That is, chapter 4 anticipates the fact that God can also bring about a new creation as the one who stands at the beginning and the end of all things. At the beginning and the end of creation, the one who was and is to come is able to bring about a new creative act. And in chapter 5, we find this vision of the Lamb, who opens a scroll to set its contents into motion.

In my opinion, chapter 5 is about God putting into motion a new creative act through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So, in chapter 5, Jesus Christ is worshipped and praised because he is responsible for redeeming all things. God is the creator of all things; now, he is the redeemer of all things in chapter 5 so a new

creative act is now being set in motion, as symbolized by this scroll, taking this scroll and unsealing it and unrolling it.

Now, a new creative act is set in motion through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So, what we find then is the ultimate goal of this or the ultimate end of this is Revelation 21 and 22. Now we find that the new creation arrives on earth as it is in heaven.

So that chapters 4 and 5 and 21 and 22 kind of provide bookends for John's vision, a vision of the creator of all things in heaven, who inaugurates a new creative act in chapter 5, now we find it reaching its culmination in the new creation of Revelation chapter 21 and 22. I don't want to go through the entirety of Revelation 21 and 22 in any detail, again we'll touch on this text later on several times and no doubt deal with other sections, but I just want to point to a handful of text in chapter 21 and 22 that clearly link back to the first creation and also a new creation and also the promises of the land, inheritance of the land. The first and most obvious one appears in chapter 21 and verse 1, where John says, then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven, and the first earth passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

This clearly alludes back to Isaiah chapter 65 and verse 17, I am about to create a new heavens and the new earth, the old things will be forgotten and now once more notice that contrast between the new heavens and new earth and the first heaven and the first earth that has passed away. So here we see the culmination of all the new creation language we've seen throughout the New Testament, especially a text like 2 Corinthians 5:17; if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation, or the new creation has come according to the 2011 NIV. That's the inauguration of the new creation; now we find its consummation, then I saw a new creation, a new heavens, and a new earth because the old one has passed away.

So now the new creation inaugurated by Christ receives its climactic and consummate fulfillment in the new creation that John sees in Revelation chapter 21. One thing we've already emphasized but needs to be emphasized again that we saw when we talked a couple of sections ago on Genesis is note that history ends; God's redemptive plan for history ends with a physical new creation, which means that the destiny of God's people is a very physical one. We often talk about going to heaven, and we sing songs like Heaven Is My Home and a recent book came out here in the United States, Heaven Is For Real, a little boy seeing a vision of heaven, and we get all caught up in heaven and what's heaven going to be like and going to heaven.

I don't want to quibble too much with that language, but it's often what we do with it or how we envision our eternal destiny when we think in terms of heaven. But what is interesting if I read Revelation correctly, Revelation 21 ends up with God's people

on a physical earth. Yes, a renewed one, one stripped of all the effects of sin, one that is now infused with God's life-giving presence but a physical one nonetheless.

In fact, it fits chapter 15 of First Corinthians perfectly, as our future destiny is one of a resurrected physical body. Why? Because that's necessary, the resurrected physical body is suitable for life in the physical new creation. So technically, our ultimate destiny is not to go to heaven.

Our ultimate destiny is a physical new creation. I read somewhere one evangelist quipped one time that he likes to respond to the typical evangelistic lead-in when someone says if you die tonight, would do you know for sure you'd go to heaven this person's response is yes, I would, but I do not expect to stay there very long and he understood the force of chapter 21 of Revelation and biblical theology of new creation that our final destiny is a physical creation not some spiritual ephemeral existence but a very physical concrete one. Yes, a transformed one, a renewed one, a redeemed one, one infused with God's life-giving presence, but a physical one nonetheless.

In fact, once more, that's very consistent with Genesis 1 and 2. How did God create us in the first place? As physical beings live on a physical earth, and God again does not scrap that and say well, that didn't work, so I'll just bring them up to heaven with me. No, God carries his plan out and brings his intentions for humanity in the first place, bringing them to their ultimate goal with chapters 21 and 22 reflecting what we find in Genesis. The Germans often call it Endzeit aus Erdzeit, the end time as the first time.

So, the end time in Revelation 21 and 22 reflects the first time, the er time, that is Genesis 1 and 2. So, as humanity started life in God's presence as a physical creation, that is the way we find human existence, ending with God's people living in God's presence as a new creation. Notice as well that in Revelation chapter 21, you have the lack of death, which we said the death was part of the old creation that the life of the new creation was meant to reverse and overcome. So, John says he will wipe. In verse 4, he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. Why? Because the old order of things passed away. The first creation affected by sin and under the curse because of the sin of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 now is liberated so that those things associated with the first creation, death and crying and mourning and pain, are now overcome in a new creative act characterized by the life of the new creation.

Notice, too, that the new creation has both spiritual and physical dimensions. Again, it's a physical new creation, but it also has spiritual dimensions in that, as we've already said, God is present with his people. His people experience the blessings of the new covenant.

Notice chapter 21 in verse 3. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Now the dwelling of God is with humanity, and he will be with them, they will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. So that God's people enjoy the spiritual blessings of God's presence and a relationship with him and the blessings of the new covenant on a physically redeemed and renewed earth. Another demonstration of new creation reality, I mean the whole sections of 21 and 22, is clearly within the context of a new creative act, of a new creation.

And everything that happens in this section takes place on a new earth. Again, in fulfillment of Isaiah 65 and other Old Testament texts that anticipate a new creation. Revelation chapter 20, verses 4-6, if I can just skip back one chapter to the well-known millennial chapter, we'll deal with that more.

But what I want to draw your attention to is prior to the arrival of the new creation, in Revelation chapter 20, notice that the people of God, I'll start with verse 4, I'll read 4-6, I saw thrones, Revelation 20, 4-6, I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge, and I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and received the mark on their foreheads; they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. What I want to draw your attention to is the language of coming to life or being raised.

This is the resurrection that fulfills 1 Corinthians 15. This is the resurrection, the ultimate resurrection that fulfills Romans chapter 6 and Romans chapter 8, where Paul anticipates a future resurrection for God's people that will be the ultimate fulfillment of the new creation. What is more interesting, though, with chapter 20 is that chapter 20 also alludes to Ezekiel 37, where the vision of the valley of dry bones, the dry bones come together and flesh comes on them, and then the spirit enters them, and they are given life.

Revelation 20 alludes to Ezekiel 37, and the reason it probably does is because chapters 21 and 22 allude to Ezekiel 40-48. So Ezekiel 37, the valley of dry bones, which are restored and raised through the spirit of life, now gets fulfilled in Revelation 20 with God's people being raised to life, especially those who have been martyred at the hands of the beast now are raised to life, I think, both in fulfillment of the restoration of Israel to its land and their being given life in Ezekiel 37, but also in preparation for them to enter the land, the new creation, in Revelation 21 and 22. Once more, John draws together all these Old Testament texts dealing with the new creation in Isaiah 65 and with the restoration of Israel to its land in Ezekiel 37.

Ezekiel 37 is also quoted in chapter 21 verse 3, now the dwelling of God is with humanity, and he will be with them, they will be his people, and God himself will be with them. Again, this comes right out of Ezekiel 37. So John is gathering together

new creation texts, land texts, restoration of Israel to its land to show that now all those things have reached their ultimate fulfillment with God's redeemed people living on a new land, a new earth, in God's presence, just as God intended Adam and Eve in the first creation, just as God intended for Israel in his land, now finds its ultimate fulfillment and consummation with God living with his people on a renewed earth, a renewed land, with God's presence in their midst.

The last thing to point to is the clearly indicative of new creation language is chapter 22 of Revelation 22, 1 and 2. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life as clear as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the Tree of Life, bearing 12 crops of fruits yielding its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree are used for the healing of the nations. Now, I won't go back and read it, but this text clearly alludes to Ezekiel chapter 47, and I think the first 12 verses where you find the same thing: out from under the temple flows a river, and it eventually becomes deeper and deeper, eventually flows into the Dead Sea.

You find trees growing on either side of the river. Now, of course, for reasons we'll see in the next section when we talk about the temple, for reasons we'll see later, John does not have the river coming out of the temple but coming from the throne, which is in the center of the New Jerusalem. But now John conceives of the new creation in Revelation 21 in terms of the Garden of Eden, which he gets from Ezekiel 47.

But Ezekiel 47 is also drawing on Eden imagery, Garden of Eden imagery. So John portrays the new creation not as only a fulfillment of Isaiah 65 and another new creation text, but now he goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. What God intended for his people in the Garden of Eden now finds its promise, its promised fulfillment in the new creation.

And also then, by alluding to Ezekiel 47, which is about the restoration of Israel to its land, we're being told God's intention for humanity in the original creative act and for the nation of Israel who was to enter the land, now that all finds its ultimate fulfillment in the Garden, the new creation that is now restored and brought to fulfillment in Revelation chapter 21 and 22. So in conclusion, what I want to do is sort of summarize the New Testament teaching on new creation and then just draw out a couple of implications for that. First of all, then by way of conclusion summary, the new creation, which is anticipated and promised in the Old Testament as God's intention to restore humanity to his original creative goal, is now inaugurated spiritually and physically through the resurrection of Christ and in his people by virtue of them belonging to Christ, being joined to Christ's resurrection, and receiving the spiritual life of the Holy Spirit.

But it will be consummated in a physical new creation at the end of history, Revelation 21 and 22. Again, in my opinion, the land of Palestine that Israel occupied and that Jesus occupied in the first century then became a type of renewal and restoration that expanded to eventually embrace the entire creation as God's gift to his people. So, let me go back and say some of that again.

First of all, the new creation, the theme of new creation, which was anticipated and promised in the Old Testament as God's intention to restore his original creative act in Genesis 1 and 2. That new creation is now inaugurated both spiritually and physically in Jesus' own resurrection and then in us by virtue of belonging to Christ and being joined to Christ in his resurrection. But it will be consummated in a physical new creation at the very end of history, where God's people will occupy the land creation as God intended in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. So, let me just draw out a couple of implications for this. First of all, one that we've already mentioned, but it bears repeating because I think we often overlook this and suffer because we do so.

And that is once more to be reminded that according to the Bible's storyline, our destiny is not a heavenly one but an earthly one. And again, that's how God created us. In Genesis 1 and 2, God creates us to be physical beings, well physical and spiritual beings, but not less than physical beings, who live in physical bodies on a physical earth.

God's intention, then, is not to scrap that for a different plan or a different reality, but God's plan is to renew our bodies and to renew the earth. Again, this was God's intention from the beginning, from creation, that we would be physical beings living on a physical earth. This idea that we're simply spiritual beings, the body is simply a container that we hope to escape and live in heaven, that's more a Gnostic idea from the first, second and third centuries, not a biblical idea.

But God does not scrap his original plan in Genesis 1 and 2, but instead he brings it to its goal by redeeming and renewing and restoring all creation and his people. So that once more, Revelation 21 and 22, as we saw, ends with God's people living on a physical earth in God's presence as the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan beginning in Genesis 1 and 2. So our destiny is not a heavenly one, but an earthly one. Now I'm okay for people to talk about going to heaven.

I use that language myself sometimes, but just so we know what we mean, that we're not talking about escaping this earth, escaping this body so I can live in the heavenly spiritual world, but actually in Revelation, in chapter 4 and 5, heaven comes down to earth. So, in chapter 22 of Revelation, the throne that's in heaven now is on earth. But the point is that we need to be serious about the fact that our destiny is a heavenly one, not an earthly one.

Sometimes, when I hear how people describe heaven, it is no wonder people don't want to go there. When we think of the proverbial cartoon caricature of heaven as a place with clouds, and we're wearing these white robes and walking around if that's heaven if that is what heaven's like, I'm not sure I want to go there. But the Bible doesn't portray heaven anywhere like that.

Instead, when I read Revelation 21 and 22, it gives me great hope, and it excites me if that is my destiny, and it gives me something to look forward to. That means that this earth is worth sacrificing for. When Jesus calls me to sacrifice, even to suffer on this earth, to sacrifice the things of this world, it's worth it when I know that because there's a world that he still has waiting for me that's worth sacrificing for.

I'm not sure I want to sacrifice this earth to float around in a white suit in heaven as a spiritual being, but it's certainly worth sacrificing this world for a redeemed renewed one. I mean, you think about everything that you love about this world. Think of a world that is stripped of all the effects of sin.

Think of a world where there's no pain or crying or death. Think of a world where there's nothing to disappoint. Think of a world that fulfills everything that you hope for and long for.

That's the new creation of the New Testament of Revelation 21 and 22. A second implication is, having said what we have so far, the question arises: are the land promises then simply spiritualized? When I go back and read the Old Testament, the promises of the land seem rather concrete and physical, and now am I suggesting that the promises of the land have simply been spiritualized? Because several texts we've looked at seem to suggest that the rest in the land now is fulfilled in inheriting Christ, inheriting salvation, eternal life, etc., sharing in Christ's resurrection as a fulfillment of the new creation, have the land promises simply been spiritualized? And my answer to that is simply no, they have not. First of all, we've noted that the land promises in the new creation have both spiritual and physical dimensions to them.

In the present, in the already inauguration of the new creation, perhaps the spiritual promises are the most prominent. But when we look at Revelation 21 and 22, in the not yet, the physical, the creation is every bit as physical as this one. So the new creation realities, the promises of land, are not spiritualized.

Instead, they are very physical because Revelation 21 and 22 end up with God's people on a physical new earth. In fact, again, Jesus himself came to a physical land, the land of Palestine, the promised land. And in the future, in Revelation 21 and 22, once more, God's people will inherit the land, will inherit the earth.

One question that is often on people's minds is, will Israel get their land again in the future? My answer to that is both yes and no. And I want to again emphasize, in the future, should we expect Israel to once more get the land of Palestine, that piece of real estate just east of the Mediterranean Sea? And my answer is yes and no. No, not in terms of settling in present-day Palestine as we know it, but sometime in the physical future.

The reason I say that is because I think the land of Palestine played a role pointing back to God's intention in Genesis 1 and 2 of returning to the land, to the entire creation that God had given his people, but also pointing forward to fulfillment in Christ and the new creation in Revelation 22. For example, we saw in Hebrews 3 and 4 that it functions sort of as a type of something greater. So, in that sense, Israel, I personally don't think, will settle in the present land of Palestine.

But yes, they will. Yes, they will settle in the land in that they will one day possess the physical land of the new creation in Revelation 21 and 22. In fact, both Jews and Gentiles will.

But what the land was pointing to, that the land that Israel possessed and the land that Jesus walked in first century Palestine would expand to eventually include all of creation, now finds its fulfillment in Revelation 21 and 22. And so I would say yes, they will get their land when Jew and Gentile together live in God's presence on a new creation, which is the intended goal of God's redemptive plan all along.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his lecture series on New Testament Theology. This is session 5, Creation, Land, Recreation in the New Testament, Part 2.