

# **Dr. David L. Mathewson, New Testament Theology, Session 8, Temple in Revelation 21-22**

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his lecture series on New Testament Theology. This is session 8 on The Temple in Revelation 21-22.

We looked at the New Testament evidence or texts that demonstrate that God's temple dwelling, God's tabernacle dwelling, His intentions for the tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament, and the prophetic expectations are now realized and fulfilled already in Jesus Christ, first of all, and then by extension, His followers.

But there's a not yet dimension as there is with most of these themes. There's an already, but not yet dimension. The not yet dimension of the temple is found in Revelation chapter 21 starting with verse 1 and through 22 and verse 5. Now, I will not read this entire section to you.

We'll refer to certain sections of it as we begin to look at Revelation 21 and 22 in terms of temple imagery, in terms of its relationship to the temple theme, and its fulfillment of that theme. But in Revelation 21 and 22, we read of a new creation. John sees the climax of redemptive history in a new creation and a new Jerusalem as its center.

But what is probably the most startling passage in this section, especially in light of the Old Testament passages that Revelation 21 and 22 allude to, and in light of other Jewish visions and expectations of the future of a new creation and of a future restoration and redemption and consummation, what is startling is what John says towards the end of chapter 21. So in 21, actually, John relies on Ezekiel 40 through 47. In chapter 21, John, like Ezekiel, takes a tour, but it's not of the temple.

It's of the new Jerusalem the city. John takes a tour of the new Jerusalem, and he sees its gates and its walls. The angelic being who guides him on this journey measures the different sections of the new Jerusalem, just like you find in Ezekiel.

When it seems that John is now inside the city, perhaps at its center, he says something interesting in verse 22. John says I did not see a temple. Now, why that is odd, again, is number one, the Old Testament passage that John is drawing heavily upon, Ezekiel 40 through 48, the temple is at the center of it.

What Ezekiel sees, what the angelic being takes him on a tour of, and what he measures is the temple. But now John, intriguingly relying on Ezekiel, in contrast to Ezekiel in verse 22, says, I did not see a temple. And again, perhaps John is at the

center of the new Jerusalem and where you would expect, the very place you would expect to see a temple, John says, I didn't see one.

John may also be modeling his city based on ideal Greco-Roman cities or Hellenistic cities of the day, which somewhere in the center, perhaps at the Plaza or Agora, would have had a temple or temple dedicated to the gods or the emperor. And now again, where perhaps John in the center of this city, where he, you might expect to find a temple, whether in Greco-Roman cities or in Old Testament expectations of the restored Jerusalem, John says, I did not see a temple. Other Jewish apocalypses, for example, in 1 Enoch, along chapters 80 through 90 and beyond, 1 Enoch describes a restored temple or a restored Jerusalem, and it contains a temple.

So Jewish expectations of a future restored Jerusalem virtually always included a renewed temple or a rebuilt temple, as we find in Ezekiel 40 through 48. But John says, where you might expect to find a temple, John says, I did not see a temple. And the reason is that John goes on to say, I did not see a temple in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

This is almost consistent with what we saw in the Gospel of John, where Jesus himself was the temple. Jesus' own body was the temple that he would raise up. In the person of Jesus Christ, God's tabernacling and temple glory now dwelt with the people.

Now, in a similar fashion, John says, there is no temple in the new Jerusalem. Why? Because God and the Lamb are the temple. In other words, what the temple had been pointing to all along is now a reality with God and the Lamb dwelling with their people on a new creation, just as he did in the Garden of Eden back in Genesis 1 and 2. So, the reason there are no more temples is that what the temple was trying to anticipate and point to is now a reality.

God and the Lamb are dwelling directly with their people on earth in an actual literal place on earth, just as he did in the Garden of Eden. So, for that reason, there's no more need for a temple. And John says, when he looked at the very place you might expect one in light of Jewish expectations, such as in Ezekiel 40-48, and even in light of Greco-Roman and Hellenistic portrayals of an ideal city, John does not see a temple because it has now reached its fulfillment.

What it was pointing to is now a reality. But I would suggest to you that that is not the end of the matter. It's interesting that John seems to equate the New Jerusalem with the temple.

What we're going to find John, although he says, I didn't see a temple, that is, there's no physical separate temple, what John does is he takes temple imagery from Ezekiel 40-48 and from elsewhere in the Old Testament, and he applies it, he superimposes

it on the entire New Jerusalem and new creation. Once more, the entire creation, the entire New Jerusalem, is now a temple where God resides and dwells with his people. So, John does not see a separate temple because God and the Lamb are the temple, but at the same time, the entire New Jerusalem has now become a temple.

Let me simply mention six or seven things in Revelation 21 and 22 that clearly demonstrate that. First of all, in chapter 21 and verse 3, a text that we have looked at already and will continue to look at, in chapter 21 and verse 3, John quotes the New Covenant formula from Ezekiel chapter 37 and Leviticus chapter 26, probably the same two passages that Paul quoted back in 2 Corinthians 6.16 to demonstrate that the church was a temple. Now John refers to those in chapter 21 and verse 3, where John says in Revelation 21.3, I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, look, God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.

They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. We saw in Ezekiel 37 and also in Leviticus 26 that this covenant formula anticipated or prefaced the description of the establishment of the temple. In Ezekiel 37, we find this covenant formula: God's dwelling will be with his people, followed by 40 through 48, which describe that temple, that describes that dwelling.

Now, John does something similar in 21:3; John gives us the covenant formula: God's dwelling is now with his people; he will dwell with them, they will be his people, he will be their God. And then what we find next is not a description of the temple, but we find a description of the new Jerusalem. So, the new Jerusalem bride is the temple, the dwelling place of God.

So that God again dwells not in a separate physical structure or temple building. Now, God's presence is coextensive with the entire creation and with the entire new Jerusalem. In fact, without going into a lot of detail, I would argue that the new Jerusalem here, much like we see taking place in Paul's letters and also in the 1 Peter 2 passage that we looked at, is the new Jerusalem here probably primarily refers to the people themselves. The new Jerusalem is equated with the bride, which earlier the bride was clearly the people themselves.

So, I think what John is doing is the same thing Paul did, taking building and temple imagery and applying it to the people. Now John does something similar here, taking new Jerusalem imagery and even temple imagery and applying it to the people. So, the new Jerusalem is primarily referring to the people themselves.

And so, the temple also primarily refers to the people themselves that now live on and exist on the new creation, on a new earth. But 21:3, the covenant formula from Leviticus 26, Ezekiel 37 in Revelation 21:3 demonstrates that the new Jerusalem people, the new covenant dwelling of God with his people, not in a separate temple.

John said there isn't one, 21:22, but instead, the entire people, the entire new Jerusalem, is now the dwelling place of God, the temple.

The second thing to say that we've already mentioned is that almost paradoxically, and very interestingly, Ezekiel 40-48 is the primary model, the primary Old Testament model that John draws upon for his description of and conception of the new Jerusalem. But at the heart of Ezekiel 40-48 is the description and measurement of a new temple, a restored separate temple, and a separate temple from the new Jerusalem. But paradoxically again, John does not see a separate temple, chapter 21.22, but now applies Ezekiel 40-48 to the new Jerusalem itself, to the new Jerusalem bride itself.

For example, John measures the city instead of the temple in Ezekiel 40-48. The temple gets measured. All the parts of the temple are measured in Revelation 21.

It's the city that gets measured. In chapter 22 of Revelation, verses 1 and 2, the river of life flows from the throne. In Ezekiel 40-48, it flows from the temple.

So again, John took the temple imagery from Ezekiel and applied it to the whole city. A couple of other interesting ones is that in Ezekiel 40-48, especially chapter 43 and verse 16. In Ezekiel 40-43 and verse 16, in describing the restored temple and its parts.

Let's see, 43 and verse 16, we read this. Above all, the author is describing the altar. Above all, the altar hearth is four cubits high, and four horns project upwards from the earth.

The altar hearth is a square, or it lies four square. Interestingly, in the Septuagint, the Greek translation, that's the same word that you find in Revelation chapter 21 and verse 16 to describe the new Jerusalem. So, Paul says in 21-16, the city was laid out like a square or four squares.

Again, the Greek word there's the same word in the Greek translation of Ezekiel chapter 43 and verse 16 describing the altar. So once more, the author, John, takes language from Ezekiel 40-48 and applies it now not to a separate temple but applies it to the whole new Jerusalem. And again, that's because now, since the Lamb and God are the temple, there's no longer a need for a separate temple.

So, temple imagery signifies God's dwelling, and anticipating God's presence with his people now applies to the entire city. Much or perhaps similar to finding connections between the Garden of Eden and creation in Genesis 1 and 2, finding temple imagery and tabernacle imagery already in the description of the Garden of Eden. Now we find temple imagery applied to the new creation, to the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21.

So what John measures, what is four squares, where the water flows from, is no longer a separate physical temple because John says there's not one, and there's no need for one. So, John sees Ezekiel 40-48 being fulfilled, but now not in a separate physical temple as you found in Ezekiel or as you would find in most Jewish literature or apocalyptic literature and their expectations of a restored creation, a new creation, a new Jerusalem. Instead, now, the entire city, which probably refers to the people, is a temple in whose midst God dwells.

The entire city is now a temple where God's presence is coextensive with and spread throughout the entire creation, no longer restricted to a separate building. In fact, as we'll see once more, this is now the goal of God's intention for creation in Genesis 1 and 2, where God dwelled not in a physical building, where God dwelled in Eden and where the entire creation was to be a place of God's presence. Now, we find that fulfilled in Revelation 21 and 22.

So that the physical temple was meant, as we already saw when we talked about the Old Testament text, the tabernacle and temple both seem to be a microcosm of the entire cosmos, anticipating a time when God's glory and his presence would fill all of creation like it was supposed to in Genesis 1 and 2. Now we find that goal reached in Revelation 21 and 22, which is why there's no need for another temple, a separate physical temple because the goal of the temple has now been reached, has now been realized. So the entire new creation is the temple, and John takes Ezekiel 40-48 and applies it not to a separate physical structure but to the entire New Jerusalem in fulfillment of Ezekiel and other Old Testament prophetic expectations of God dwelling with his people. So, first of all, we looked at the new covenant formula that in the Old Testament anticipates the dwelling of God in a tabernacle or temple.

Second, we looked at John applying Ezekiel 40-48, which concerns a rebuilt temple. John now applies that to the New Jerusalem. Again, almost paradoxically, where the temple was the main concern of Ezekiel's vision, there is no temple in John's because its purpose has now been fulfilled.

A third demonstration or piece of evidence that demonstrates that the New Jerusalem is meant to be a temple is the presence of the precious stones in Revelation 21, verses 19-20. So, in verse 19, Revelation 21, John has already referred to the foundations to demonstrate again that John probably means to equate the city symbolically with the people, as the foundations of the city are equated with the apostles. The names of the apostles are on the city in Revelation 21, verse 14.

Now, John is going to tell us more about these foundations. In verse 19, he says, The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, and then I won't go through the rest of the eight stones.

But each of the twelve foundations is equated with twelve specific stones in Revelation 21, verses 19-20. What is significant about that, as virtually every commentary will tell you, is the stones are meant to represent the stones on the breastplate of the high priest. Exodus chapter 28 and Ezekiel chapter 26, which interestingly have connections with the Garden of Eden and Adam being a priest.

So, the stones are meant to connect not only with the breastplate of the high priest but also with the original sanctuary, the Garden of Eden. So, the stones on the breastplate of the high priest, now associated with the foundation stones, suggest the priestly function of the New Jerusalem. Suggests that the people now function as priests of God in the New Jerusalem.

Perhaps again, this reflection of what one finds in 1 Peter chapter 2. Now, God's people are a holy priesthood that offers sacrifices of spiritual praise acceptable to God. Now, explicitly, the association of the precious stones with the foundations, the stones being the stones from the high priest's breastplate in Exodus 28, is also evident. Another Jewish literature, as well, now suggests the priestly function of the entire New Jerusalem people as a holy temple of God.

Another important link with the temple is found in the makeup of the city. And that is, besides the precious stones, the metal that seems to play the most dominant role in the New Jerusalem is gold. So, in chapter 21 and verse 21, the great street of the city was gold, as pure as transparent glass.

And most, especially Greco-Roman cities, usually had a main thoroughfare going down the middle of it. This could also, perhaps the word here could also mean a broad place or even a plaza at the center of the city. But in either case, the author identifies the street or plaza as made of gold.

But even more than that, back in chapter 21 and verse 18, the author says the wall was made of jasper and the city of pure gold as pure as glass. So, ultimately, the entire city is made of gold. Now, what is significant about this, as we have mentioned already in the Old Testament, surveying some of the Old Testament evidence, is that gold played a dominant role as the prominent metal used in the construction of both the tabernacle and the temple.

So, to give you one example, I'll leave it to you to go back and read the description of the tabernacle in Exodus. Also, read in more detail 1 Kings 5-7 and sections of that where gold just crops up all over the place as the main metal used in the construction. But just to give you one example, in 1 Kings 6 and 19-22, he prepared the inner sanctuary within the temple to set the ark on the covenant of the Lord there.

The inner sanctuary was 20 cubits long, 20 wide, and 20 high. He overlaid the inside with pure gold, and he overlaid the altar of cedar. Solomon covered the inside of the temple with pure gold, and he extended gold chains across the front of the inner sanctuary, which was overlaid with gold.

So, he overlaid the whole interior with gold. He also overlaid with gold the altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary. And we could read more, but you get the idea.

Everything is apparently overlaid with gold. So now the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 is gold. So, I take it that the effect of this is not just to suggest the surpassing value of the New Jerusalem and its beauty, although that is certainly true.

But I think the author does not want you to miss the connection with the Old Testament. What else was made of gold? Well, we just read that in 1 Kings, the temple was overlaid with gold. The inner sanctuary was overlaid with gold.

And so gold, the presence of gold in the New Jerusalem, the Golden Street, the city made of gold in 21:18, is more than just a description of its beauty; it clearly equates the New Jerusalem with the temple. However, gold is also connected with paradise or the Garden of Eden, which we said was a sanctuary. And again, to kind of work back in layers, if the New Jerusalem, if gold in the New Jerusalem connects back to the temple that is covered and overlaid with gold, the gold in the temple and tabernacle probably also have some connection back to the Garden of Eden, which we saw is a sanctuary.

The temple and tabernacle were meant as miniature gardens of Eden. They were meant to recapture and recall God's dwelling in His sanctuary, the Garden of Eden. Well, we saw in one of the texts we read in Genesis chapter 2, and especially verses 11 and 12, that gold is already associated with the Garden of Eden.

So, in chapter 2, verses 11 and 12, we read the name, if I can back up, verse 10, a river watering the garden flowed from Eden. So, the river flowing in chapter 22 of Revelation, flowing from the throne, also recalls not only the temple in Ezekiel 47, but it also goes back and recalls the river flowing out of the Eden temple, the Eden sanctuary, where God resided with His people. And now, in verse 11, we read, The name of the first river is Pishon.

It winds through the entire land of Havilah, where gold is found. The gold of that land is good. He goes on to say there's also onyx in verse 12 of Genesis 2. So gold and precious stones also connect not only with the temple but also back to the Garden of Eden, which is the original temple sanctuary where God dwelled with His people.

And now we find that in the New Jerusalem. So, the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21 and 22 is a temple garden. A temple garden is a sanctuary where God now dwells

with His people in fulfillment of Genesis 1 and 2, the tabernacle and temple, and the prophetic expectation, such as Ezekiel chapters 40 through 48.

That was number four. A fifth point to make is notice in 21 verse 16 how the city is described in Revelation 21-16. The city was laid out like a square as long as it was wide.

He measured the city with a rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length. I'm not going to go into the precise units of measurement or anything like that. But then he says it is as wide and high as it is long.

In other words, the New Jerusalem is cube-shaped. It's shaped like a cube. Its length and its width and its height are equal.

That is, it's in the shape of a cube. But I want you to notice if you go back to 1 Kings, again 1 Kings 5-7 is a description of the construction of the original temple, the first temple by Solomon. In chapter 6 and verse 20, the author says the inner sanctuary was 20 cubits long, 20 wide, and 20 high.

He overlaid the inside with pure gold, and he also overlaid the altar with gold. In other words, the length, width and height of the inner sanctuary were the same. That is, it was cube-shaped.

And so now it's as if John wants to make clear that this is not only a temple, the entire New Jerusalem is a holy of holies. It's the inner sanctuary. It's in the same shape.

It's shaped like a cube, just as the holy of holies is in 1 Kings chapter 6. So again, the cube shape of the city is not just for the sake of beauty and symmetry, although it is that. Often in John's language, more than one thing is going on. His language is sometimes very multivalent.

It evokes more than one idea. So having a cube shape does show symmetry and beauty, but it also, and I think primarily, is meant to recall the shape of the inner sanctuary from 1 Kings chapter 6. A couple of other indications of the temple function of the New Jerusalem are in chapter 22. Chapter 22 and verses 3 and 4, we read this, No longer will there be any curse.

The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him. They will see His face, and His name will be in their foreheads. Probably once more, I recall the description of the priest who would have the name of God in their foreheads and enter the presence of God and the holy of holies to stand in God's presence.



Now, the entire people of God, not just the priest, but the entire people of God, now function as priests who stand in God's presence, who serve Him with God's name in their foreheads, and who stand in God's presence and see His face. So once more, priestly language in connection with the tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament is now applied, not to a separate group of priests, but now the entire people of God function as priests who serve God in His presence. One last one, number 7. This is the 7th one, I had to come up with 7 in Revelation.

But the 7th one is in chapter 22 and verse 5. There will be no more night, they will not need the light of the lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. In other words, it seems that the lamp that gave light in the temple now is no longer needed because God Himself enlightens and gives light to the New Jerusalem temple. So, all of these things, the New Covenant formula in chapter 21-3, which anticipates the New Covenant dwelling of God with His people, the fact that John draws on Ezekiel 40-48, which concerns the rebuilt temple, but now he applies it to the New Jerusalem people.

The stones on the breastplate of the high priest in 21:19 and 20 signify the priestly function of the entire New Jerusalem people. The fact that gold is the dominant metal in the New Jerusalem is a reflection of gold playing a key role in the construction of the tabernacle and the temple as well. The cube shape of the city recalls the shape of the Holy of Holies.

The people functioning as priests with God's name written on their foreheads, serving God in His presence, seeing Him face to face, recalling the function of the priests in the Old Testament. And now God is giving the New Jerusalem light. God's glorious presence fills the New Jerusalem so that there's no longer a need for a lamp to give it light.

All of these suggest that the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21 and 22, which again primarily symbolizes and signifies the people themselves, is consistent with Paul's use of the language. Now, the entire New Jerusalem is a sanctuary temple garden where God dwells with His people in fulfillment of the Old Testament temple and tabernacle, but also prophetic expectations of a rebuilt temple, Ezekiel 40-48, but also a fulfillment of God's original intention for creation, that God would dwell with His people on earth. And now we find God dwelling with His people on a new earth.

But His dwelling now is coextensive with the entire city people and with the entire creation so that there's no need for a separate temple. And to add to what we've already said, part of the reason why there's no need for a separate temple as well is that the tabernacle and temple that necessitated it in the first place have been removed. That is, the first creation affected by sin, Genesis chapter 3, it was human sinfulness, it was human rebellion and disobedience that required a tabernacle and temple in the first place.

When we looked at the Old Testament, we said one of the things that the Tabernacle and temple did was that the way it was structured restricted God's presence as much as it made it available. Yes, the temple was how God dwelled with His people, but the way it was set up sort of restricted God's presence so that God primarily dwelled in the Holy of Holies, and only the high priest could enter that once a year. Now we find that all of God's people have access to God's presence all of the time.

And so, the very thing that required a temple, sin and evil and the old order, has now been removed. John says the old creation, the old heavens and earth, has passed away, and the sea is no more. There's no more mourning and crying and pain.

Why? Because those things that caused it have now been removed. The very thing that required a tabernacle and temple, the first creation, and sin and evil, has now been removed so that there's no longer a need for a separate temple or tabernacle. God can now dwell directly with His people just as He did in the first creation in Genesis 1 and 2. So the goal of the tabernacle and temple has now finally been realized in the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21 and 22.

Not only that, but God's intention for His creation in Genesis 1 and 2 has now reached its climax through the long process of redemptive history, now finding its goal and ultimate fulfillment in the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21 and 22. Where God now dwells immediately and directly with His people in a new creation. Now, this raises an interesting question that most people are intrigued with and wonder about, especially those who belong to certain theological traditions.

And that is, in light of everything we've said, not just in Revelation 21 and 22, but the Old Testament and other Old Testament texts, and the New Testament texts that we've looked at in some detail, is, will the temple be rebuilt? Given what we read in Ezekiel 40-48, for example, and Old Testament expectations of a rebuilt temple, and given the role the temple played, should we expect a rebuilt temple sometime in the future? Should we expect Israel to rebuild its temple and the sacrificial system to be reinstated and the temple to function and play a role sometime in the future? My answer to that is maybe we should. Maybe there will be a temple rebuilt. Maybe somehow, Israel will rebuild its temple again.

Though as most of you know, right now, the Temple Mount is occupied by Muslims, and the Dome and the Rock right now make it virtually impossible that that could happen in the current state of affairs. But it's possible that Israel one day could have its temple rebuilt and institute its sacrifices again. But I am not sure that this is significant for biblical prophecy.

And again, given what we've read, and given what we've seen as far as the biblical, theological development of the temple theme, the temple points to, the primary

function of the temple seemed to point to God's presence with His people and the extension of that presence to embrace the entire creation and the entire earth. Then, we see in the New Testament that this was fulfilled by Jesus Christ and His people. And then finally and ultimately in the new creation.

And in the fulfillment of the temple promises and prophecies in Christ and His people and in the new creation, a physical temple does not seem to play a role. Why? Because the goal of the temple has already been reached. The purpose of the temple has now been realized with God dwelling directly with His people in Christ in the church through His Spirit and then one day in all of creation in the new Jerusalem people.

So, this would, to me, would seem to render another physical temple unnecessary. Why? Now that the reality has arrived, why would they want to go back to the symbol, to the copy, to the shadow that anticipated it? Now that God has manifested His presence in the person of Jesus Christ, now that God dwells directly with His people, and now that His presence is going to be manifested according to Revelation 21 and 22 in the entirety of the new Jerusalem without a physical temple, why would we want to go back to a physical temple if the goal has now been reached? It would seem to render a new physical separate temple unnecessary. So, while one day there may be another temple rebuilt in Jerusalem, I'm not sure that that should be seen as a fulfillment of prophecy because I see Jesus Christ and His church, the fulfillment of God's tabernacle temple, Eden dwelling with His people, that then gets consummated in a physical space in the new creation.

So again, there is a literal physical aspect to the fulfillment, but it's not so much in a physical building as much as it is now in the physical creation, which is the way God intended it in Genesis 1 and 2. To refer to Greg Beal again, he described it this way. He said one time, when he was separated from his wife overseas before they were married, he had a picture of her, and he would look at that picture frequently. But once they were reunited again, he said, what would be the point of looking at the picture all the time when I have the reality? And he equates that to the temple.

Why would we want to go back to the physical temple when the reality to which it has pointed is now here, is now a reality, and that is God's dwelling with His people. For that reason, once more, perhaps Israel will rebuild its temple, but I'm not sure that has anything to do with biblical prophecy. Because as I understand it, now that the goal has been reached, why would God's people want to go back to it? Why would God go back to the shadow or the copy now that reality has reached its goal and fulfillment? Now, the next theme that I want to introduce to you that is in many respects related to the theme of temple, as well as a number of other themes, is the theme of covenant or the covenants.

Let me start by saying that the covenant or covenants throughout the Bible are the fundamental structure that explains God's relationship with His people. Now again, this is not quite like saying it's the main theme, though some have argued that, starting with Walter Eichrodt in the Old Testament, and some others have argued that covenant is the main theme or the center of the Bible. At the very least though, it is the fundamental structure that explains God's relationship to His people throughout the Old and New Testament.

And again, some have seen it as the center, but if it's not, it does lie at the heart of God's redemptive relationship with His people. So, it is important, it is important to spend time on it and see it as an important biblical-theological theme and New Testament theological theme that gets developed throughout the Bible. Before you look at it, perhaps the first thing to ask is, what is a covenant? And once more, I don't want to spend a lot of time or go into a lot of detail, but what do we mean by covenant when we talk about the covenant or covenants in the Bible? As far as the lexical data, usually the idea of covenant revolves around the Hebrew word *berit*, or the Greek word *diatheke* in the New Testament; both of those words are usually translated as covenant and are used to refer to the covenant relationship that God establishes with His people.

Although, as we've mentioned in other contexts, we cannot necessarily restrict ourselves or limit ourselves to the presence of this word. That is, even in places where *berit* or *diatheke* may be lacking in the Old and New Testament, we can assume that the concept of covenant is not present. We cannot assume that.

There may be a covenant going on, even in the text where the lexical data is not present. But basically, a covenant is... Old Testament scholars particularly have been helped by examining ancient covenants in the ancient Near East and the light that sheds on the biblical data. But a covenant could be described... One way of describing it is it's a formal declaration or agreement that determines the legal framework for a relationship between God and His people.

And this is usually confirmed by or established by an oath. So, a covenant is a formal declaration or agreement that determines the legal framework for the relationship between God and His people. And again, that is usually confirmed or established by an oath.

At the heart of the covenant is the fact that God is seen as a king who enters into a relationship with His people by adopting the people as His children. For that reason, some scholars have suggested that wherever you see family language in the Old and New Testament, father and children are underlying the assumption of a covenant relationship. But it begins with God as the sovereign, as the king, who enters into a relationship by adopting His people as His children.

And He becomes their father. And so, for example, to anticipate, if you remember part of the covenant with David, the Davidic covenant, I will be your father, you will be my son. That's covenant language where God is the sovereign king who enters into a relationship by becoming a father, and He adopts His people as their children.

So, that is, God elects or chooses His people. The covenant is based on God's electing or choosing. This then suggests, at least in the biblical covenants, that God is the primary initiator of the covenant.

People do not decide that they want a covenant, so they go to God and try to work something out. But God is the one who graciously establishes a covenant relationship and takes the initiative to establish a covenant relationship with His people. Now, in a very helpful article on a chapter on covenants in a book entitled *Central Themes in Biblical Theology*, Scott Hafemann has isolated, relying on others as well, Scott Hafemann has isolated three elements of a covenant.

In the Old Testament in particular. He said, first of all, that God takes the initiative to graciously provide for His people and establish a covenant relationship. So, once more, God is the initiator of the covenant.

God is the one who makes provision, who graciously makes provision for His people in a covenant relationship. The second element is that the covenant carries with it stipulations or obligations for maintaining that covenant relationship. So, there are certain obligations on the parties involved in the covenant in order to maintain the covenant and to keep the covenant relationship.

Third, there are covenant blessings and curses that come for either keeping or failing to keep the covenant relationship. So, there's a lot more we could say about covenant, but at the very least, God takes the initiative and graciously provides for the people in a covenant relationship. The second is that the covenant carries with it obligations and stipulations for maintaining that covenant relationship.

And then, finally, in connection with that, there are curse blessings and cursings based on keeping or failing to keep the covenant. One very important element of the covenant as well that we've already referred to and I've seen in connection with a couple of other themes is probably basic to the covenant that the covenant relationship can be summarized by the formula: I will be their God, and they will be my people. And we saw that in Leviticus 26, verses 11 and 12.

We saw that in Ezekiel 37, which is in a number of other places. So that language of I will be their God, they will be my people seems to be the formula that summarizes and encapsulates what is at the heart of the covenant relationship. Now, just a couple of issues related to the covenant or the covenants in the Old Testament and New Testament.

Once again, we'll spend at least one session looking at the Old Testament evidence and very quickly summarizing the Old Testament covenants and how that gets developed, and then spend most of our time looking at the New Testament development of the covenants, particularly the new covenant. But one of the issues is how many covenants are there? There's broad agreement on most of the covenants, such as the covenant made with Noah in Genesis 9, the covenant made with Abraham in Genesis 12, and the following the covenant made with David, the Mosaic covenant. There's broad agreement on most of the covenants.

But one of the main questions that we'll look at is whether there was also a covenant at creation. We raised that just briefly earlier, but there's some disagreement then as to how many covenants are there in the Old Testament. And I don't want to or hope to definitively solve that, but at least raise the question, was there also a covenant at creation? Another important question is the relationship between all these covenants. Traditionally, there have been two approaches.

These are not the only approaches, and there are variations within them. These two approaches have even modified their view of the covenants. But classically traditionally, and historically, there have been two approaches to the relationship with the covenants. The movement known as dispensationalism has traditionally seen more discontinuity between the covenants and more disconnection between some of the covenants, especially in terms of how they get fulfilled in terms of the church.

Whereas the movement known as covenant theology has tended to see more continuity, which is basically just one covenant relationship expressed in a variety of ways. So, we'll talk a little bit about the relationship between the covenants. Should we see more discontinuity? Should we see more continuity between them? Or perhaps we should see elements of both discontinuity and continuity between the covenants? For our purposes, the covenants that we want to focus on, again, we'll talk primarily in the next section about the Old Testament, the covenants found in the Old Testament, and then look at how they get developed and fulfilled in the New.

The primary covenants that most agree on are the Noahic covenant, the covenant made with Moses, I'm sorry, Noah in Genesis 9; the Abrahamic covenant, the covenant made with Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, 17, 22; we find references of that. The Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7, and we find that in 1 Chronicles, in some of the Psalms, we find references to the Davidic covenant. The Mosaic covenant is the covenant made with Moses.

The Levitical covenant, a reference to the covenant made with Levi and the priesthood, is one that I probably will not spend any time on and deal with. And then

finally, the New Covenant, Jeremiah chapter 31 is the most explicit reference to the New Covenant. Again, there's the question: what about creation? Is there a covenant? Or was there a covenant at creation? In Genesis 1 and 2. Now, the word covenant is not used there, and so for that reason, some have concluded that there was no covenant creation, while others, most recently, a book produced a couple of years ago by Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum called *Kingdom Through Covenant*, argues at great length that there was a covenant at creation in Genesis 1 and 2. What is the relationship between the covenants? I don't want to spend a lot of time describing the specific relationship between the Covenants and the Old Testament, but let me summarize.

Once more, Scott Hafeman, in his article or his chapter on covenants in *Central Themes*, a book entitled *Central Themes in Biblical Theology*, says that Scripture testifies to one constant relationship between God and His people throughout redemptive history that is formalized and embodied in its successive covenants. So, I think that's a helpful way to look at it. Although there are several different covenants, the Noahic, Abrahamic, Davidic, Mosaic, etc., is all these covenants are probably meant to express successively one overarching, the overarching relationship or covenantal relationship that God establishes with His people.

So, again, Scripture testifies to one constant relationship between God and His people throughout redemptive history that is formalized and embodied in its successive covenants. So, what we want to do then in the next section is examine in the Old Testament examine those successive covenants. We'll begin by looking very beginning by considering very briefly Genesis 1 and 2 and whether we should talk in terms of a covenant there and then move on to in canonical order and historical order to look briefly at the different covenants.

What were they? What was their function? And then again in preparation for how those get fulfilled in Jesus Christ and the New Testament.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his lecture series on New Testament Theology. This is session 8 on The Temple in Revelation 21-22.