

Embracing a vision of the New Jerusalem (Rv 21:1–22:5) to impact on life and society

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Dates:

Received: 27 June 2014

Accepted: 27 Aug. 2014

Published: 20 Apr. 2015

How to cite this article:

Pohlmann, M.H., 2015, 'Embracing a vision of the New Jerusalem (Rv 21:1–22:5) to impact on life and society', *In die Skriflig* 49(2), Art. #1854, 7 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i2.1854>

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Apocalyptic biblical literature has played a significant role in motivating and mobilising Christians. As part of this genre, the Apocalypse of John has played this mobilising role within the church throughout its history. Jerusalem is often incorporated into this genre to conjure up different emotions and images to impact many different people. For example, the Jew annually recites the words to fellow Jews at every Passover meal: 'Next year in Jerusalem'. Most Christians know the hymn 'The holy city', originally penned by Frederic Weatherly in 1892. It lifts many a spirit as it conjures up the idea of a beautiful, perfect, heavenly city of God. However, there is more to this apocalyptic vision, which will be explored in this article. The city upholds the hope of decent godly living today. Whilst Jerusalem is a city with an extremely chequered history, it remains to be the launching pad of a dream that believers can embrace in order to impact society for the better. The vision in Revelation 21–22 is the launch of the 'idea' of God's intention for society today, and the 'implementation impetus' is the primary role of the church. In the greater scheme of things, the world community is the target group for a better society for everyone.

Aanneming van 'n visioen van die Nuwe Jerusalem (Op 21:1–22:5) ten einde 'n invloed op lewe en die samelewing uit te oefen. Apokaliptiese Bybelliteratuur het 'n beduidende rol in die motivering en aansporing van Christengemeenskappe gespeel. Die Openbaring van Johannes het hierdie motiveringsrol deurgaans in die geskiedenis van die kerkas deel van dié genre vertolk. Jerusalem is dikwels hierby ingesluit om 'n verskeidenheid van emosies en beelde op te roep ten einde 'n impak op 'n verskeidenheid mense te maak. Die Jood, byvoorbeeld, haal jaarliks die volgende woorde teenoor mede-Jode tydens die Paasmaaltyd aan: 'Volgende jaar in Jerusalem'. Die meeste Christene ken die gesang 'The holy city' wat oorspronklik deur Frederic Weatherly in 1892 geskryf is. Dit hef menige gelowiges se gemoedere op omdat dit die beeld van 'n pragtige, perfekte stad van God oproep. Daar is egter meer aan hierdie openbaringsuitsig wat in hierdie artikel verder ondersoek word. Die hemelstad bekragtig die hoop vir 'n godvrugtige lewe vandag. Alhoewel Jerusalem 'n stad met 'n uiters veelbewoë geskiedenis is, is dit tog die beginpunt vir hierdie droom van gelowiges om die samelewing te verbeter. Die visioen in Openbaring 21–22 is die bekendstelling van die 'idee' van God se bedoeling vir ons hedendaagse samelewing en die 'vervullende beweegkrag' is die primêre rol van die kerk. Holisties beskou, is die wêreldgemeenskap die teikengroep vir 'n beter samelewing vir almal.

Introduction

The method of writing this article will follow a biblical theological path. The text of Revelation 21:1–22:5 is assumed to be part of the traditional Canon of Scripture. Thus, there is an assumption of progressive revelation (Genesis to Revelation) and a constancy of 'inspiration' (2 Tm 3:15). Whilst a brief and cursory exegesis will be done on certain key elements of the chosen text, the method followed will be far more biblical theological where relevant passages of Scripture are engaged to develop the theological thought, as the text is engaged grammatically, historically and theologically. This will cover comparative Old Testament, New Testament and Apocalyptic passages.

There will not be a direct engagement with the traditional millennial models of eschatology. However, the implications for all these views will be obvious to those reading this article from the perspective of any one of the models. The approach will be far more eclectic in nature, allowing the text and interaction of texts to create a fresh and challenging perspective through this eschatological subject with its implications for life (2 Pt 3:11).

'Jerusalem is the universal city, the capital of two people's, the shrine of three faiths, the setting for Judgement Day and the battlefield of today's clash of civilizations' (Montefiore 2012: inside

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cover). It all began with Abraham and his son, Isaac. Genesis says:

Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love – Isaac – and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.' (22:2)¹

The first mentioning of Jerusalem as a city name is in Joshua 10 under the rule of Adoni-Zedek. These two worlds of an ordinary city, on one hand, and then later to be the place for God's plan to unfold in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, were to unite into one dream city:

He has founded his city on the holy mountain. The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the other dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are said of you, city of God. (Ps 87:1–3)

A further brief historical sketch of Jerusalem is gleaned from Montefiore's book: *Jerusalem: The bibliography*. The biblical history kicks into high ratio with David taking the stronghold by force (Montefiore 2012:27): 'Zion was said to be impregnable and how David captured it is a mystery.' He renamed the place 'The city of David'. It was a small place of some 15 acres but *significant* in terms of its location.

After some significant and turbulent history, the temple and Jerusalem were destroyed by an arch rival, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Montefiore 2012):

In the seventh month of Kislev', declared Nebuchadnezzar's chronicle, preserved on a clay inscription, 'the Babylonian king marched to the land of Hatti [Syria], besieged the City of Judah [Jerusalem] and on the second day of the month of Adar [16 March 597] took the city and captured the king'. (pp. 50–51)

However, the dream and vision of Jerusalem was not lost. A series of prophets, leaders, builders and ordinary people were to redream the city under God's inspiration. Inspired by prophets like Haggai and Zechariah, taught by Ezra the scribe, and finally led by Nehemiah, the city of Jerusalem's walls were rebuilt and the temple repaired:

At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres. (Neh 12:27)

The dream of Jerusalem was alive again. God had his holiest spot in their temple: 'Our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem' (Ps 122:2) and 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: 'May those who love you be secure' (Ps 122:6).

Jerusalem would be repeatedly challenged as the winds of political change blew through the Middle Eastern region. Daniel, an exilic prophet, warned the people of Jerusalem about the 'abomination of desolation' in the temple three times in his prophecy (Dn 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). Daniel had seen something of this threat personified in Nebuchadnezzar during his own lifetime and warned about future occurrences: 'From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the

abomination that causes desolation is set up there will be 1,290 days' (Dn 12:11).

One of these prophesied occurrences took place with the intervention of Antiochus Epiphanes (167 BCE). Montefiore 2012:

Then Antiochus forbade any sacrifices or service in the Temple, banned the Sabbath, the Law and circumcision on pain of death and ordered the Temple to be soiled with pig's flesh. (p. 75)

The final historical fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy would be the destruction of the temple by the Romans when temple sacrifices ceased, and still cease to this very day. Brian Russell (2013:171) correctly sees that: 'The seventy sevens, then, are consecutive.' The 490 'heptads' of Daniel's prophecy (Dn 9:24) take us to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

It is important to note Herod the Great's contribution to the temple and to recognise that it was Herod's temple that the historic figure Jesus was to contend with. Herod chose to create one of his masterstroke buildings to cement political relations with his Jewish subjects. 'Herod pulled down the existing Second Temple and built a wonder of the world in its place' (Montefiore 2012:102). Mark 13:1 makes reference to this temple: 'As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!". Some of these extraordinary huge stones can still be evidenced in the remaining foundation stones of the Western 'Wailing Wall' in Jerusalem where Jews still pray for the *vision of Jerusalem*. Bauckham (1996) correctly says:

Thus the New Jerusalem of the future, the bride of the Lamb, has both a forerunner in the present and an opposite in the present. The forerunner is the holy city, mother Zion. (p. 128)

Revelation 21:1–22:5 in recapitulation

Jerusalem is a vision that is historical, doctrinal, existential and eternal. When John describes the city of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21, Beckwith (1979:755) says: 'This vision of the holy city is shaped throughout by the eschatological imagery contained in the prophets and apocalyptists.' Some of these are found in the Ezekiel vision (Ezk 40–48) and in the reflection of Isaiah, especially Isaiah 66. Beckwith (1979:755) goes in to say: 'To the description of this new Jerusalem are transferred all the splendors of the earthly Jerusalem in the earlier eschatological writers.'

There is a perpetual recapitulation throughout Scripture, on the one hand, and then a more detailed recapitulation within the Apocalypse of John itself, bringing the book to a climax in chapters 21 to 22. The purpose of this climax is not only to point readers to the future eternity of grandeur that God has for us 'through the Lamb', but also to stir our memory of the biblical Jerusalem as well as hold out a 'dream vision' of all that God has for us. This is designed to create an *existential tension* to mobilise people to transform society. Bauckham (1996) adds:

1. All quotations shall be from the NIV (2011), unless otherwise indicated.

The universalism of the vision of the New Jerusalem completes the direction towards the conversion of the nations which was already clearly indicated in [Revelation] 11:13; 14:14; 15:4. Its universal scope should not be minimized. (p. 139)

Though *transformation* is a broad term, the Christian community has a distinctive goal of transformation through Jesus Christ as 'the Lamb'.

The vision in Ezekiel 40–44

Ezekiel is an exilic prophet. He knew of the past destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. He had experienced exile with all its challenges for the Jewish people. His vision from God pointed the people back to Jerusalem, where he envisioned a new historical geographical city with a temple. The vision is more than that, however. It becomes prophetic, apocalyptic and everlasting. The line between time and eternity – what is seen and what is not seen – is blurred, and only finally realised in the writing of Revelation 21–22.

Psalms 137:1 expresses the limited vision of Jerusalem by the people in Exile: 'By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion.' The Jewish people had localised God to one place on earth: 'How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?' (Ps 137:4). Ezekiel's vision of the temple in a New Jerusalem answered their desire for a restored building, but, more importantly, went beyond it towards a global, international and eternal perspective (Bauckham 1996:136): 'The description of the New Jerusalem in many respects closely follows Old Testament models (especially Isa 52:1; 54:11–12; 60; Ezek 40:2–5; 47:1–12; 48:30–34; Zech 14:6–21; Tob 13:16–17)'.

Beckwith (1979) makes the important point about Ezekiel's vision:

In Ezekiel's vision of the future Jerusalem the temple forms the principal object; likewise in Jewish eschatology in general it is an essential part of the glorified city, e.g. Is. 44:28, 60:13. (p. 763)

Ezekiel and the Exiles were still primarily concerned about themselves and their future in Jerusalem. They wanted to get back to where they were prior to the Exile. However, the inspiration of the Spirit in Ezekiel raises the visionary expectation somewhat. By the time the Apocalypse draws on Ezekiel's prophecy, there is *no temple* (Beckwith 1979:763): 'Its absence in the vision of the Apocalypticist echoes the Christian thought of Jn. 4:21, 23.' John's Gospel explains this to a Samaritan woman who was confused over 'temple' locations. Was she to worship at the local Samaritan shrine or the traditional Jewish temple? "'Woman,'" Jesus replied, "Believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem"' (Jn 4:21). Jesus is in one sense already alluding to himself as the new Temple. The need for a 'place' was soon to become obsolete.

The interplay between Ezekiel's chapters and those of Revelation 21–22 are important to note. One aspect is (Wright 2011):

... the extraordinary measurements of the city. (The angel measures this heavenly city, as John was told to measure the heavenly temple in 11.1; this time, we find out what the measurements were, as in the original vision of Ezekiel 40–48 which lies behind a great deal of John's vision at this point). (p. 194)

However, Botha (1988:145) is correct to emphasise that: 'The author also differs from Ezekiel in that he elaborates upon the wall of the city and emphasizes that there is no temple.'

Isaiah's vision (Is 65:17–66:24)

Gornik (2002) on Isaiah's vision:

When Scripture paints a picture of the new creation, its most comprehensive image is the new city of God. According to Isaiah 65:17–25, the new city forms part of the peaceable home that fulfills God's promised justice for the poor, salvation for the humble, and the renewal of creation. (p. 25)

Isaiah's prophecy is very similar to that of Ezekiel. Both these prophets were Exilic prophets moving the Israelite nation with their words towards a future of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem as well as the temple. At all costs, the people needed to get back to where they were before the Exile.

Typical of most apocalyptic passages of Scripture as contained in the major and minor prophets, they cause people to look above the immediate and visualises the future – firstly in physical terms, then in spiritual terms and finally in eternal terms. 'For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit' (2 Pt 1:21). Whilst Isaiah was well aware of the people's need of their city Jerusalem and the temple, he unpacks the deeper *meaning of Jerusalem* and the original meaning for having the temple in the first place by drawing people's attention to the worship of God again.

The prophetic hope contained within Jerusalem is always seen by the prophets within the bigger picture of God's covenant. Whilst locality and livelihood are critically important – as can be witnessed in the present argument for Jerusalem within the Middle East political debates – the prophetic meaning points everyone to the *theological sense*. Moltmann (1973) helps us here when he says that:

When we cease using God as helper in need, stop-gap and problem solver, we are according to Augustine – finally free for the *fruitio* *Die et se invincem in Deo*, the joy of God and the enjoyment of each other in God. (p. 80)

The Apocalypse (Rv 21:1–22:5) upsets the desire often found in the Old Testament people with their focus on the temple by removing and replacing it with the presence of God (Rv 21:22): 'I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.' The physical city providing Israelites with protection by its walls, living conditions and all city services are eclipsed by a cubic symbol city. Wright (2011) suggests that:

... the city is not only vast in terms of its footprint – fifteen hundred miles each way, roughly the same number of square miles

as the Roman Empire (That, of course may be part of the point). It is also fifteen hundred miles *high*. (p. 194)

In one sense, this city eclipses the Roman Empire!

The Apocalypse provides the final recapitulation in Revelation 21:1–22:5

Beckwith (1979:771) is at pains to demonstrate that Revelation 21:1–22:5 is part and parcel of the overall chapters of the Apocalypse due 'to numerous examples showing parallelism with other parts of the book and indicating the work of the same hand'. The first comparison is Revelation 17:1 with Revelation 21:9:

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, 'Come. I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute who sits by many waters.' (Rv 17:1)

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the last plagues came and said to me, 'Come I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.' (Rv 21:9)

The same angel gives the two perspectives to the same author. One perspective is on the great prostitute and the other perspective on the bride of Christ. The Apocalypse typically deals with one vision at a time, and sometimes deals with them in different chapters.

Revelation 17:3 and 21:10 convey the same idea: 'Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness' versus 'And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high.' The phrase *the glory of God* is repeated in Revelation 15:8 and 21:11. Further, Revelation 21:15 ('The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls') is very similar to Revelation 11:1: 'I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, with its worshippers".'

Some verses in chapter 21 (God, the Lamb, the Bride) contrast with verses in the body of the text, especially where there is reference to the 'prostitute'. For example, Revelation 21:19 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.' Revelation 17:4 says of the 'woman':

The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.

There is a constant cross-referencing throughout the Apocalypse contributing to its whole as a letter, prophetic words from God and apocalyptic literature. One of the most consistent points in the Apocalypse is the significant statement in Revelation 21:23: 'The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.' The first chapter sets the scene in verse 17:

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last'. (Rv 1:17)

König (2007) correctly makes the point that:

... once Jesus is seen as the goal of creation and the *eschatos*, the consummation can be seen as reachable (in one sense, as already reached!) before the end of natural world history. (p. 39)

Revelation 11:17 follows on from Revelation 4:8: 'We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your power and begun to reign.' The theme continues onto Revelation 16:7: 'And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments".' Throughout the Apocalypse the typical motion found in an epistle is eclipsed by the 'cubic' vision given in Revelation 21–22. The existential is overwhelmed by the 'eternal now' of God who straddles the past, present and the future with equal ease. For example, Revelation 1:7 includes the final 'end' with 'those who pierced him' with equal ease.

Six key verses in identifying the transferable concepts of the New Jerusalem

Within the Revelation 21:1–22:5 passage, there are six key statements that fit like building blocks to create the overall *Weltanschauung* (Pohlmann 2008:93–244) of the Apocalypse as well as the overall perspective of God's activity revealed in Scripture. There are parallel verses like them found dotted within the New Testament. Their concepts are transferable and applicable today. Whilst there is an eternal and future dimension to the Apocalyptic understanding of the New Jerusalem, it is primarily meant to be embraced within God's present administration of the Kingdom (Eph 3:9–11).

First verse: Revelation 21:3

The 1st verse of importance and the key verse within this section is Revelation 21:3:

And 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.'

This has been the *plan* ever since Creation (Gn 1–3). This verse is 'richly endowed with motifs from the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel that are concerned with the restoration of the Jerusalem temple after its destruction: God will dwell among his people' (Stuckenbruck 2003:1568).

This verse states in one single theological construct the purpose of the election of Israel, the life of Jesus Christ and the mission of the church:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (Jn 1:14)

Following on from this, Pohlmann (2010) expands:

Just as God positioned the famous Jerusalem Temple in Temple Mount for all to see a sign of His presence – God has now positioned the church comprising of individual Spirit filled believers – ‘in the world’ yet not ‘of the world’. (p. 139)

It is God’s will to be ‘among the people’. This started with Eden, regrouped with Israel (Gn 12:1–3), perfected with Jesus and now exists through his Spirit in the church.

Second verse: Revelation 21:5(a)

The 2nd verse of significance is Revelation 21:5(a): ‘He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”’ Charles (1976:154) correctly informs us that: ‘The old world has vanished: God creates a new world.’ The idea of *quality* is what emerges here. When God creates or recreates, he puts the stamp of his character on it.

Third verse: Revelation 21:6(a)

The 3rd verse of significance is Revelation 21:6(a): ‘He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End”.’ This was the announcement made to John on the Isle of Patmos:

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said, ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.’ (Rv 1:18)

The reality of an ‘eternal now’ living Christ is the reality of the entire New Testament age. The conceptual results and outcome are fixed from the very beginning when Jesus triumphed over death in the resurrection.

Fourth verse: Revelation 21:22

The 4th verse of significance is Revelation 21:22: ‘I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.’ It is significant to note that the Greek word *ναός* is used, referring to the inner sanctuary of the Holy of Holies.

Initially, God ‘walked’ in Eden with our first parents. Later, the tabernacle was built as a portable ‘sanctuary’ and ‘meeting place’. Eventually, the great temple was built on Temple Mount, housing the ‘sanctuary of meeting’. Jesus challenged this by presenting himself as the ‘new sanctuary’ (Jn 2:19): ‘Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days”.’ Here, just as in Revelation 21, the Greek word *ναός* is used, referring to the ‘shrine’ of meeting God in person. 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19 make the same reference to the abiding Holy Spirit within the Christian life. Therefore, Revelation 21:22 is no surprise, but rather the culmination of all things implemented in God’s salvation.

Fifth verse: Revelation 21:24

The 5th important verse is Revelation 21:24: ‘The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring

their splendor into it.’ One of the ‘I am’ sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John is: ‘I am the light of the world’ (Jn 8:12). The light of Christ eclipses everything portrayed as darkness. The radiance of this light was so overwhelming to the angry pre-converted Rabbi Saul that it struck him to the ground (Ac 9:3). What happened here on a personal level can happen on a societal and national level, if people would be willing to embrace the ‘light’ of the New Jerusalem.

Sixth verse: Revelation 22:5

The last verse of importance, acting as the sixth pillar theological statement is Revelation 22:5:

There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever.

Genesis 1:3–5 and 1:14–19 have been eclipsed by a ‘new heavens and a new earth’. The New Jerusalem depicts everything God and Jesus are by nature. God is by nature light and Jesus is light. Those who embrace the vision of the New Jerusalem become ‘the light of the world’. The Christian community should always be busy dispelling ‘darkness’ in favour of ‘light’.

Embracing the vision for change

There are obvious points about Jerusalem that we are not expected to embrace. For example, no one is expected to rebuild the city of Jerusalem or the temple or the sanctuary of the temple under Christian mandate. The Christian mandate in Acts 1:8 is *away* from geographical Israel’s Jerusalem and not back towards it:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to all the ends of the earth. (Ac 1:8)

God’s ultimate plan is for ‘Jerusalem’ (in the theological *and* eternal sense) to be taken to the earth and not the earth to Jerusalem.

Embracing the presence of God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit

God initially came to us in creating the world in which we live (Gn 1–2). This was God’s initiative and he continues to display this initiative. The choice and appointment of Abraham as covenant partner and the establishment of an ‘elect’ nation was God’s initiative (Gn 12:1–3). The advent of Jesus Christ to ‘seek and the save that which is lost’ (Lk 19:10) was God’s initiative. The Word came to live amongst us and we have seen him as the only true Son of God (Jn 1:14). Our responsibility is to embrace the presence of God by faith (Rv 21:3a): ‘Look! God’s dwelling is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.’ The word translated as ‘dwell’ is translated from the Greek word *σκηνή* [tabernacle], which is the same word used to describe Jesus in John 1:14. With Jesus and the presence

of the Holy Spirit, we have the *presence of God*. We need to embrace the reality of God's presence in the eschatological existential present reality, even though it has 'not yet' been fully realised.

Be part of everything 'new' that God is doing

Whilst the tension between the 'now' and the 'not yet' will always be felt, it should not mitigate against us embracing the restored order of things that God has already introduced. Christ has 'destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility' (Eph 2:14b) and made it possible that:

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. (Ac 2:17)

Based on the work of Christ, there is something refreshingly new and creative available to us. The church holds the key to more transformative opportunities than many people realise. These need to be embraced in order to present a 'new city' of hope for people. As (Kidwell 2014) puts it:

The thinking goes: rather than Israel becoming like Canaan, the reverse will be the case, Canaan will be culturally absorbed into Israel, and this will serve as a sign of the triumph of God's holiness in this kingdom. (p. 2)

Enjoy the eschatological moment that we have

The presence of Christ has eclipsed (König 2007:23–31) all former focuses on temporary things. As in the alphabet, Christ is the beginning and the end of the alphabet, and everything in-between!

The dye has been cast and it is only a matter of time for all things to be worked out (Rm 8:28) according to the plans and the purposes of God:

But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. (Heb 10:12–13)

The Apocalypse of John demonstrates the dramatic developments unfolding. Romans 1:18 summarises the basic principle seen more illustratively in the Apocalypse: 'The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness.' We need to embrace the fact that Satan, sin and death have been judged and Christ is our answer in overcoming these through his cross and resurrection (Rm 1:4).

We have been shown the way

There is no need to look any further than Christ. God is with us (Mt 1:23; *Immanuel*). There is no need for a special pilgrimage to Jerusalem or any other holy site in order to embrace what God has intended for us. Christ has revealed the Father to us wherever we may be.

All the nations of the world are beneficiaries

Wherever God's people embrace the Gospel of Christ in truth, everybody benefits! Jesus Christ developed a gospel that was both private and public, both personal and communal. Jesus 'went on to imprint the Kingdom of God radically on every facet of life' (Pohlmann 2014:8). Jeremy Kidwell (2014) illustrates the same point when he reflects on Zechariah 14:

The closing chapter of Zechariah offers an 'apocalyptic' description of the age to come. There, the writer describes the new kingdom as a sort of impenetrable bulwark in the midst of violent conflict and collapsing political order. (p. 1)

In the New Jerusalem, like in the expectation of Zechariah 14, Kidwell (2014:2) notes that 'God cares about truthfulness in the way we represent value in business' (cf. Rv 22:24–27 compared to Zch 14:21).

We should move in the direction of the eternal construct and not the time construct

Just as the tabernacle, the temple, the sanctuary and the city of Jerusalem have all served a valid purpose in the past, the time is coming when created time will also have served its purpose. As 2 Peter 3:10 says:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

We need to keep looking forward and upward towards the culmination of the Gospel.

George Eldon Ladd (1997:682), who represents a classical premillennial model, is willing to agree with those of a realised millennial model that the New Jerusalem embraces a culmination of the Gospel: 'The description of the city is highly symbolic. Its inhabitants include the redeemed from both the Old Testament (21:12) and the New Testament (21:4) times.' Yet, it is more than just a glorious picture – there is a sense that the symbol of the New Jerusalem should be embraced by those who focus on God's future.

Conclusion

Professor Jan du Rand (2004) offers a broad overview on the apocalyptic vision of Revelation 21–22:

To a large extent, the apocalyptic eschatology of the Apocalypse is shaped within the framework of soteriology. The descent from heaven of the new Jerusalem is the eschatological fulfilment of OT as well as early Jewish apocalyptic expectations within the restorative frame. Particularly Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Zechariah have made meaningful contributions in this regard. The rebuilding of the temple within the relationship of the heavenly Jerusalem to the new Jerusalem is of utmost importance. (p. 275)

Believers need to dream again within the biblical framework. On the one hand, there is the challenge of 'Babylon' (Rv 17:18) as it affects everyone on earth negatively. Believers

have a positive hope by embracing the vision of the New Jerusalem. Jesus Christ came to bring the Kingdom and glorify the Father.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

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