

PARADISE MOTIFS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Introduction

Among Christians, the books of Genesis and Revelation are generally referred to as the first and the last books of the Bible. And that is quite true, when one considers the position these two books have been given in the Bible: it begins with Genesis, and it concludes with Revelation. It is just as true when one pays attention to the themes that are central to these books: the beginning and the end of the present world order.

In regard to their age, however, it is not so simple. The debate is still ongoing. In the case of Genesis, it depends on whether Moses is to be seen as its main author. If so, then Genesis could be regarded as the oldest book of the Old Testament; but even then, the book of Job appears to be very old according to some scholars.

In the case of Revelation, this book is generally taken to be the most recent New Testament book, because of all the future-oriented visions it contains. However, the early tradition needs to be taken into account: this holds that John, after his exile on Patmos – where he saw these visions – was released again, and went to live in Ephesus. There, at a very old age, the apostle wrote his gospel.¹ In that case, not Revelation but the gospel of John ought to be regarded, historically, as the last book of the Bible. For an unsuspecting reader of Scripture, that would be a strange thought: the Bible beginning with the book of Job and ending with the gospel of John...

Nevertheless, if we take our starting point in the canon as it has been handed down to us, then Genesis is indeed the first book of the Bible, and Revelation its last. The biblical canon forms an integrated whole, for there is a clear connection between these two books. More precisely: the beginning of Genesis, the account of the creation of heaven and earth, is linked to the end of Revelation, which presents us with the prospect of a new heaven and a new earth. The final part of Revelation has been called the capstone of the Christian Bible, and rightly so.² The grand narrative of God encompasses the past, the present and the future, from beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation.

¹ Eusebius, *Church History* III 18,1. The apostolic authorship of Revelation is disputed, but that makes no difference to the argument of this article. The author communicates his own authority in his work, since he presents himself unambiguously in the role of a Christian prophet (David A. de Silva, *Seeing Things John's Way. The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009], 33). In the remainder of this article, simply the name 'John' will be used, as he calls himself in Rev. 1:9 and 22:8.

² Thomas Hieke & Tobias Nicklas, "Die Worte der Prophetie dieses Buches". *Offenbarung 22,6-21 als Schlussstein der christlichen Bibel Alten und Neuen Testaments gelesen* (Neukirchen/Vluyt: Neukirchener Verlag, 2003).

In this article I would like to investigate which motifs from the story of creation in the first book of the Bible recur in the last book, and what role these motifs play there.³ I intend to cluster the relevant textual material into seven such motifs, and discuss each separately. In every case, the book of Revelation will be the starting point, from which lines are traced back to the book of Genesis. This article does not aim at offering various new exegetical insights, but at presenting a biblical-theological overview of paradise motifs in Revelation.⁴

These motifs are:

1. The paradise garden of God
2. The new heaven and the new earth, where there is no sea
3. God and the Lamb as the eternal source of light
4. Servants who reign as kings
5. Free access to the tree of life
6. A river of living water, with deposits of precious stones
7. The removal of the dragon-snake: the paradise curse lifted.

In the discussion of these seven motifs, the similarities between Revelation and Genesis will, of course, be highlighted. And at the end of this article I will, by way of conclusion, also identify the differences between them.

By ‘paradise motifs’ I understand those elements of John’s visions which, to trained readers of the Bible, are reminders of the creation story of Genesis 1-3. The world to come (with the new Jerusalem as its world capital) stands fully in line with the world of paradise as it was in the beginning. In line, that is, seen from a redemptive-historical perspective.⁵ And by ‘trained readers’ I mean in the first place John himself, the human author of a book full of heavenly visions; then his first audience in Asia Minor, near the end of the first century AD; and finally people such as ourselves, readers from the First World at the beginning of the 21st century.

1. The paradise garden of God

There is only one place where the book of Revelation explicitly refers to paradise. It is not where we might expect it: in the description of the new Jerusalem (chapter 21-22) where most of the paradise motifs are found. We find it where Christ concludes his personal letter to the church at Ephesus with the promise of life: “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of

³ On the question: ‘did John really see things?’, see the balanced exposition of De Silva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 121-124.

⁴ See also my previous article “The Book of Revelation: Full of Expectation,” *Sárospataki Füzetek* 15 (2011): 11-19.

⁵ Yarbrough has pointed again to the lasting relevance of this perspective: Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Salvation Historical Fallacy? Reassessing the History of New Testament Theology* (Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2004).

God” (Rev. 2:7).⁶ The reference in this text to the tree of life – another paradise motif, to be discussed separately in section 5, below – shows that this must be a reference to Genesis 2-3.

The Greek word *παράδεισος* was first used by the historian Xenophon, around 400 BC. It is a loan word, borrowed from the Persians and Medes. Its original meaning is not disputed: *pari* = around; *daeza* = wall; *paridaeza* = a walled enclosure, such as the private parks of rulers and nobles. The Greeks, however, understood the word to mean what was contained within the wall, that is the royal gardens. When in Alexandria the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, its translators knew all about the pleasure-gardens of the ruling Ptolemies. Besides, Hebrew had borrowed a similar word from the Persian: *pardes*, a royal preserve. It occurs three times in the Old Testament (Neh. 2:8; Eccl. 2:5; Song 4:13). That explains why the translators of the Septuagint in Genesis 2, where the Hebrew word גַּן indicates a fenced garden, used *παράδεισος* rather than the simpler κήπος (garden: an open space, not enclosed, where ordinary plants and trees grow) to describe the garden of Eden.⁷

In this way, the garden of Eden was rightly described as a pleasure garden. The Hebrew עֵדֶן גַּן could be translated as ‘land of joy’ or ‘happy land’. Strictly speaking, however, this ‘garden’ and ‘Eden’ are not identical, for Genesis 2:8 tells us that the LORD God planted a ‘garden in Eden’ (גַּן בְּעֵדֶן). This pleasure garden was located ‘in the east’ (the local and most commonly understood meaning of the Hebrew מִקְדָּם in Gen. 2:8) or perhaps ‘in the beginning’ (the temporal sense used by the Vulgate, which may be preferable).⁸ God himself planted a garden in Eden, trees and all. A fitting name for this garden is indeed גַּן אֱלֹהִים, ‘the garden of God’ (as in Ezek. 28:13 and 31:8-9). This pleasure garden, the very opposite of a barren wilderness, truly belongs to the invisible dwelling-place of God. Hence the other Biblical reference to ‘the garden of YHWH’.⁹ The second chapter of Genesis calls to mind a palace garden, complete with fruit trees, with the man God created placed in it as his custodian. YHWH appears as the lord of the manor, walking through his garden in the pleasant cool of the evening (Gen. 3:8).

⁶ All Scripture quotations and references in this article are taken from the New International Version of the Bible (NIV), 1984. The apocryphal books are cited from the New American Bible (NAB), 1970.

⁷ Jan N. Bremmer, “Paradise: From Persia, via Greece, into the Septuagint.” In *Paradise Interpreted. Representations of Biblical Paradise in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Gerard P. Luttikhuisen (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 1-20. In Luke 23:43 and 2 Cor. 12:4, *παράδεισος* denotes the heavenly paradise, the abode of believers after death.

⁸ The argument for this reading can be found in T. Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden. Genesis 2-3 and Symbolism of the Eden Garden in Biblical Hebrew Literature* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 261-270. The temporal meaning of מִקְדָּם is undisputed in eg. Mic. 5:1. The Vulgate has ‘a principio’, an allusion to ‘in principio’ in Gen. 1:1. Hence, the garden of Eden is typified as something from a bygone era; paradise is far in the past, and no longer to be found in the present.

⁹ Gen. 13:10; Isa. 51:3. A survey of all Old Testament references to Eden can be found in T. Stordalen, “Heaven on Earth – Or Not? Jerusalem as Eden in Biblical Literature.” In *Beyond Eden*, eds. Konrad Schmid and Christoph Riedweg (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 28-57 [31-36].

Against this etymological background of the word *παράδεισος*, it is striking that Revelation 2:7 places the promised tree of life ‘in the paradise of God’ (ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ). In their Lexicon, Louw and Nida note the following: “the reference may reflect somewhat more closely the historical background of this term. It is appropriate to translate: ‘the garden of God’, especially since in the context the reference is to the fruit of the tree of life”.¹⁰ Therefore, the promise contained in 2:7 could be represented as follows: ‘To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise garden of God’.¹¹ Those who conquer belong in the company of the Conqueror, and they will be allowed to live in God’s natural environment, that is his royal domain.

2. A new heaven and a new earth, where there is no sea

Various exegetes¹² have rightly pointed to the chiasmic structure of Revelation 21:1-5a:

- A A new heaven and a new earth (1a)
 - B The first heaven and earth have passed away (1b)
 - C There was no longer any sea (1c)
 - D The new Jerusalem comes down out of heaven (2)
 - D1 The dwelling of God is with men (3)
 - C1 There will be no more death, etc. (4a-4c)
 - B1 The old order of things has passed away (4d)
 - A “I am making everything new!” (5)

Together, ‘heaven and earth’ represent the created order. In Genesis 1:1, the expression ‘heaven and earth’ is a comprehensive formula for the entire cosmos. We are told how the first heaven and the first earth were created. ‘Heaven’ stands for the heavenly expanse; ‘earth’ represents the dry land that appears when the waters flow away. In Revelation 20:11, John refers to this cosmic constellation when he says: “Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.” The removal of the old order takes place to make room for a qualitatively new act of creation by God.¹³ The décor

¹⁰ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida (eds.), *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains. Volume 1* (Cape Town: Bible Society of South Africa, 1989), 5.

¹¹ Gerhard Maier creates an unnecessary contradiction by noting that “nicht das vergangene Paradies von Gen 2” would be meant, but that rather is spoken “vom endzeitlichen Paradies” (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes, Kapitel 1-11* (Historisch-Theologische Auslegung; Brunnen: Brockhaus, 2009), 148.

¹² See, for instance, David E. Aune, *Revelation* (Word Biblical Commentary; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1114.

¹³ David Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth. The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21.1-22.5* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 2003), 38.

changes: a new heaven and a new earth appear (see Isa. 65:17 – a new creation; 2 Peter 3:13 quotes this prophetic promise).

In the Old Testament, ‘the new’ (καινός) refers to God’s saving intervention in the future, expected by the people of Israel; in the New Testament, it refers to the eschatological renewal brought about by the saving work of Jesus Christ. What is ‘new’? Not a renovation of the existing order: the Creator makes a clean start, as at the first. Isaiah prophesies that ‘the former things will not be remembered’, while the new order will endure (Isa. 65:17; 66:22). The striking element of Revelation 21:5a is that the One who sits on the throne (already described in chapter 4 and 5) himself, in his own person, speaks: “I am making everything new!”¹⁴

Verse 2 says that the new Jerusalem comes down ‘out of heaven’. That must mean the dwelling place of God himself, the One who transcends the old as well as the new world order. Hence the addition ‘from God’ (ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ means the same as ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ). The new Jerusalem is not a remnant of the old order; nor is it a natural outcome of the new order. It is ‘from God’, truly the ‘city of God’.

Our survey of the structure of this passage shows that this is its core. The coming of the new Jerusalem ‘out of heaven, from God’ has as its aim that henceforth God will dwell with men. In Israel, there was already an awareness that God had pitched his tent among them, so as to dwell with men (Ps. 78:60). Truly, his dwelling is ‘with people’ (μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων). Not just with Israel, not even a restored or an expanded Israel. The dwelling of God is with all of mankind. All those (converted) living on earth become his people. His covenant will reach its full extent, so that the united nations will be included in it. The new Jerusalem becomes the capital of a new world in which, because of God’s permanent presence, righteousness dwells.¹⁵

In this new constellation of heaven and earth, there will be no more room for the sea (ἡ θάλασσα οὐκ ἔστιν ἔτι). Here, the sea is apparently viewed as something negative, something threatening. Indeed, in the chiasmic structure of verses 1-5a, the sea is located in parallel with those other things that will no longer be: death, mourning, crying or pain (verse 4 a-c). A sea of sorrow will be wiped away by God’s own hand.

In contrast to Genesis 1, where the sea is portrayed as an essential element of God’s creation (although great sea monsters are mentioned too: Gen. 1:21 [NRSV]), in Revelation the sea represents the forces of evil (such as ‘the beast from the sea’, 13:1) and of death (in 20:13 the sea is associated with ‘death and Hades’).¹⁶ When

¹⁴ After an additional command to write (verse 5b), the godly voice from the throne continues in the verses 6-8.

¹⁵ According to Rev. 21:16, the new Jerusalem is almost equal in size to the ancient Mediterranean world. Note that the measuring angel was using man’s measurement. See Dieter Georgi, “Die Visionen vom himmlischen Jerusalem in Apk 21 und 22.” In *Kirche. Festschrift für Günther Bornkamm zum 75. Geburtstag*, eds. Dieter Lührmann und Georg Strecker (Tübingen: Morh, 1980), 351-372 [367].

¹⁶ See also Rev. 8:8; 12:12; 16:3. Jonathan Moo, “The Sea That is No More. Rev 21:1 and the Function of Sea Imagery in the Apocalypse of John,” *Novum Testamentum* 51/2 (2009): 148-167.

Babylon is destroyed, it is especially the prosperous seafarers who must stand helplessly by while the world economy, the stage of their venture capital, collapses (Rev. 18:17b-19). There will be a much calmer passage for the new Jerusalem, once there is no more sea.

In Genesis 1:2, the ancient ‘deep’ signifies a state in which life and habitation are impossible.¹⁷ The sea (LXX: θάλασσα) in Genesis 1:9-10 is the water, which at God’s command, is gathered together. When that happens, dry land appears, and the created world becomes fit for life and habitation, so that mankind can find a safe abode. Since then, the powers of death have made the world an unsafe place, but once the sea is no more, this threat will be removed, once and for all.

Both the Old Testament and the ancient Jewish tradition portray God as being in constant confrontation with the sea. In her study, Kloos identifies a number of divine acts relating to this topic, the most notable of these being: God sets boundaries for the sea; he lifts up his voice against her; if need be he dries it up.¹⁸ Wherever YHWH appears, the turbulent sea must draw back. When God comes to dwell forever among men, he will provide a safe abode – one without a sea view.

3. God and the Lamb as the eternal source of light

Since in the book of Revelation the presence of God in his creation stands central, the differences between day and night lose their prominence. After all, he is always there. Revelation mentions three phenomena to clarify this. Firstly, the heavenly liturgy, the adoration before God’s throne, continues day and night (Rev. 7:15, cf. 4:8). Secondly, at the same time, we do read of an absence of daytime or night time rest, occasioned by adoration of God, accusations before God, or punishment from God: these things are continually ongoing (Rev. 4:8; 12:10; 14:11; 20:10). Thirdly, the fourth trumpet announces a temporary absence of light as a warning to all of mankind: a third of the day and a third of the night are to be without light (Rev. 8:12). For a short time, God withdraws from his creation.

These phenomena show how essential the presence of God is for the world. His first act of creation was to call forth the light (Gen. 1:1-4). Wherever God appears and acts, light is going to shine. As John expresses it: “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 Jn. 1:5). Strictly speaking, on the first day according to Genesis 1 God created light only, and not darkness. His speaking appearance drives away darkness as a natural consequence. He thus assigns the darkness a place in the night. The presence of the almighty Creator is expressed in his first act of creation, the creation of light.¹⁹

¹⁷ Gen. 1:1 taken as a heading that will be developed in the following verses, with the conclusion in 2:1.

¹⁸ Carola Kloos, *Yhwh’s Combat with the Sea. A Canaanite Tradition in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (Amsterdam: Van Oorschot/Leiden: Brill, 1986), 81-83.

¹⁹ Ed Noort, “The Creation of Light in Genesis 1:1-5: Remarks on the Function of Light and Darkness in the Opening Verses of the Hebrew Bible.” In *The Creation of Heaven and Earth. Re-Interpretations of Genesis 1 in Context of Judaism, Ancient Philosophy, Christianity, and Modern Physics*, ed. George

Sun and moon (and stars) serve in this created order as heavenly lights (Gen. 1:14). That is how God has ordained it; he himself has hung these lights on the expanse of heaven. In this world they are needed, they mark the succession of day and night, the seasons, days and years (Gen. 1:16: they rule over day and night; 1:18: they separate the light from the darkness). Without them, mankind would have no awareness of the passage of time. In addition, they are the lights that make everyday living possible. But in the new world, these lights are no longer needed. For the ultimate Source of light in the new Jerusalem is God himself. Even the radiant sun and the shining moon pale in his presence (Isa. 24:23). All things return to the beginning, never to change again: we exist in the light of God our Creator.

The gates of the new Jerusalem are no longer to be closed at night; they are continually open. In Isaiah's prophecy was already foretold that in the future Zion would be the LORD's glorious city of light: "Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night" (Isa. 60:11a). It is noteworthy that Revelation tells us that the gates will not be shut in the daytime either. Might they need to be closed because of danger that threatens from outside (cf. Rev. 22:15)? The causal γάρ ("for there will be no night there", Rev. 21:24) suggests that we ought to think of the closing of the gates at the end of the day. Such a closing will no longer be necessary, when day and night flow into each other. That is clearly also the intention of Zechariah's prophecy (Zech. 14:7b): "When evening comes, there will be light".

Isaiah has this to say about Zion, the future city of light (Isa. 60:19): "The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory". Where Isaiah speaks of one source of light, in the book of Revelation that is doubled: "...the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp" (Rev. 21:23) – even though elsewhere in the Bible Christ is called 'the light', but never a 'lamp'. Fekkes explains this in terms of the Hebrew parallelism found in Isaiah: 'the LORD will be your light, God will shine on you'.²⁰ This doubling paves the way for the book of Revelation to turn the parallelism into a chiasm: "...the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp". Still, the Lamb is not an independent source of light: God and the Lamb belong together and complement each other. 'The lamp of God' was a cultic object in the tabernacle and in the temple. That light must be kept burning, unceasingly, day and night (Lev. 24:1-4). In the city that has no temple, God's shining presence, together with the Lamb as Lamp, is its perpetual source of light. Even as the godless city of Babylon is punished by the removal of light (Rev. 18:23).

At first, the light is for the new Jerusalem itself: 'the glory of God gives it light' (Rev. 21:23: ἀύτήν); then, the light is also for its inhabitants: 'the Lord God will give them light' (Rev. 22:5: ἐπ' αὐτούς). Especially this second reference makes us

H. Van Kooten (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 3-20 [7]. In 2 Cor. 4:6 Paul argues from the creation of light. Admittedly, Isa. 45:7 states that God created light and darkness; however it is clear from the context that this is meant to refer to peace and disaster (cf. Isa. 42:16; 58:10, 60:2).

²⁰ Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation. Visionary Antecedents and their Development* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 267-268.

think of the priestly blessing over Israel. For that is how the name of God was put on his people. And this also fits with the promise of the Name that is placed on the foreheads of his servants, and with the whole cultic setting of the passage: ‘The LORD make his face shine upon you’ (Num. 6:25).²¹ The ancient priestly blessing becomes a perpetual reality for the inhabitants of the new Jerusalem. Who exactly are those inhabitants? They are the nations who live in the light of Jerusalem; rulers of the world, too, will be included among those who worship God and the Lamb.²² The ‘pilgrimage of the nations’ motif in John’s visions (based on Isaiah 60 and other prophetic texts) shows us how all of them go up to Jerusalem.²³ The promise to Abraham, the ancestor of the people of Israel, that all nations will be blessed through him, finds its ultimate fulfilment.

4. Servants who reign as kings

“And they will reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 22:5b). Grammatically, the subject of this ‘reigning’ is found back in verse 3: the servants of God, who worship him. Cultic adoration in heaven was already described with reference to a great multitude, whom no-one could count: “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God day and night, and serve him day and night in his temple...” (Rev. 7:14-15). Just as to serve the God of Israel in freedom was one of the goals of the Exodus, so these people will be free to worship God forever. The throne of God and of the Lamb stands in the centre of the new Jerusalem (this is stated twice, with emphasis, in chapter 22:1 and 3). Around the throne there are the servants of God. In the verses 3b-5a, Mathewson sees them as priests, who are given a royal task as well. This combination, servants as priests and royal figures at the same time, makes us think of Exodus 19:6, where Israel is described as a ‘kingdom of priests’.²⁴ But this worshipful reigning is not confined to Israel; throughout the book of Revelation Jerusalem is revealed as the world capital for all believers (cf. Isa. 61:6; 1 Peter 2:9-10).

“They will reign”. It seems as if they are promised an almost autonomous dominion; still, these are the servants of God, who serve him. The eternal duration of this royal position is already foreshadowed in Daniel 7. Here, too, we see something of the vindication of the people of the Most High, people who have so often been oppressed. “...the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him” (Dan. 7:27). This was already announced earlier in the book of Revelation: Those who had

²¹ Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 210-211.

²² G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (New International New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1094-1096.

²³ For details, see: Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 163-175.

²⁴ Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 212-213. Here, the reference is implied. In other places in Revelation, the priest-king conjunction is quite explicit (see Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

been purchased for God from every nation ‘will reign on the earth’ (Rev. 5:10). The seventh trumpet ushers in “the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15). The martyrs, raised to life, will reign for a thousand years together with the Messiah (Rev. 20:4,6).

This calls to mind the exalted Christ’s promise of victory to the church of Laodicea: “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Rev. 3:21). The underlying imagery here is from the *bisellium* or double seat, well known in antiquity, and sometimes used to depict two deities like Zeus and Hera or emperor Augustus together with Dea Roma, side by side sitting on the throne. In this way, the royal dominion was literally and figuratively shared. Christ shares the throne with his Father (‘on his throne’).²⁵ He who overcomes will share the throne with Christ (‘on my throne’). The Father and Christ do not hand over their dominion; they allow those who share in their victory to share in their dominion as well.

Genesis 1 and 2 do not speak explicitly of royal dominion. Still, according to a broad stream of interpreters, with the mandate from Genesis 1:27-28 a kind of dominion is meant. The book of Revelation contains a latent allusion to this mandate. Man was appointed as custodian and labourer in the paradise garden of God (Gen. 2:15): he was to exercise authority over creation on God’s behalf. Adam and Eve failed in their exercise of this responsibility. And still there is hope for mankind. This world-encompassing dominion will return, but inseparably joined to the worship of God. Strictly speaking, Revelation does not specify the object of this dominion, but it is clear from Daniel 7 that this will be a dominion over the whole world. It also shows the manner of this dominion: not under God, but together with him. For ever and ever (literally, ages of ages: εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων: Rev. 22:5) is a fitting conclusion to this part of the book. Jerusalem is to be a royal city again, for all eternity.

5. Free access to the tree of life

In point 1, we already paid attention to the promise contained in the letter to the church at Ephesus, that those who overcome may freely “eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). That is a remarkable usufruct! Given the Ephesian context, Hemer sees this as an allusion to the cult of Artemis.²⁶ Originally, this virginal goddess of the hunt was worshipped in a primitive sacred grove. The tree of Artemis adorned the coat of arms of the city of Ephesus, and is to be seen on numerous Ephesian coins of the time. Still, the reference to the tree of life points in

²⁵ Hofius speaks about “Throngemeinschaft Christi mit dem Vater” (Otfried Hofius, “Das Zeugnis der Johannesoffenbarung von der Gottheit Jesu Christi.” In *Neutestamentliche Studien* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000], 223-240 [233]). For the imagery, see: Christoph Marksches, “‘Sessio ad Dexteram’: Bemerkungen zu einem altchristlichen Bekenntnismotiv in der christologischen Diskussion der altkirchlichen Theologen.” In *Le Trône de Dieu*, ed. Marc Philonenko (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 252-317.

²⁶ Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting* (Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1986), 41-50.

the first place to the situation in paradise (in Gen. 2:9 and 3:22 and 24, LXX has ξύλον, ‘wood’, instead of δένδρον, the more usual word for ‘tree’). The reverse of this promise is also found in Revelation: God may take away from any transgressor ‘his share in the tree of life, and in the holy city, which are described in this book’ (Rev. 22:19).

In paradise, there were two trees: the tree of knowledge and the tree of life (Gen. 2:9). The paradise narrative concentrates mostly on what happened with the tree of knowledge. The key was discerning between good and evil. To eat from the tree of knowledge was to exchange good for evil, so transgressing the boundary God had set. The human desire for autonomy led to a conflict with the Creator. And as a punishment for this sin, the first couple was banished from the tree of life (for to eat from that tree, as had previously not been forbidden, would have led to eternal life; that privilege was now revoked). At that time already, God began to carry out the sentence pronounced over mankind: to be kept away from life means death. Scripture also refers to wisdom and righteousness as trees of life (Prov. 3:18, 11:30, cf. 13:12 and 15:4). This shows that ‘life’ is more than just a continued existence, but a life in communion with the Creator.

In the future paradise of God, there will no longer be a tree of knowledge. It is the tree of life that has been given a central place in the new city of God; not just one, it seems, but more than one (Rev. 22:2). In the new Jerusalem, John sees a whole avenue of trees of life, planted on either side of the river that flows down the middle of the street of the great city. Inhabitants may freely pick of their fruit (because of the underlying imagery from Ezekiel 47: 7,12, the singular ξύλον is generally regarded as a collective noun, as in ‘a wood’ – unless perhaps we ought to think of two trees, one on either side of the river). These trees are spectacularly fruitful, one crop in each and every month.²⁷ Again, a remarkable usufruct! Ezekiel 47:12 describes the river of living water that flows from the sanctuary (see also point 6, below): “Fruit trees of all kinds (LXX: πᾶν ξύλον βρώσιμον) will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear ... their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.”

Inhabitants of such a city are truly blessed: “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14).²⁸ Free access to the new Jerusalem, by way of its gates, stands in contrast to the paradise story. There, cherubim – winged creatures with hands, feet and faces – stood guard over the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). They blocked the way to paradise, with the aid of a flaming sword that flashed back and

²⁷ Whether this reference is to a harvest of twelve different kinds of fruits (Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy. Studies on the Book of Revelation* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993, 316] is not altogether clear. The reading ‘twelve crops of fruit’ could also be understood as ‘one crop of fruit in each month’.

²⁸ This is the seventh and final beatitude in the book of Revelation. Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John. A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 573.

forth. This sword, symbol of God's blazing anger, was a separate entity, independent of the cherubim.²⁹ Paradise lost...

In contrast, at the gates of the new Jerusalem (open day and night, see point 3, above), not cherubim but angels stand guard. Twelve of them, three in each direction, one angel at each gate. Even though the city of God is not open to everyone (Rev. 21:27), their role seems to be to welcome people in, rather than to keep them out. They stand guard to regulate the stream of those who would come in to make their home in the new Jerusalem. Welcome to the paradise of God, where you may freely pick fruit from the tree of life!

6. A river of living water, with deposits of precious stones

The new Jerusalem is a town with its own water supply: "A river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. 22:1-2; cf. 21:6). And this while the memory of the earlier account of the disasters which came upon the earth, where water was turned into blood, is still fresh (Rev. 8:8, 16:3-4). There, the polluted water reeks of death; here, in the city of God, the water will be fresh and clear: life-giving water.

This motif – life-giving water – is found with the Old Testament prophets also. Ezekiel 47:4-7 describes the brook that flows from the temple; Joel 3:18 mentions a fountain that flows out of the Lord's house. And Psalm 46 sings of a river whose many streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. All of these point forward to the supply of water in the new city.

The combination with the trees of life in Revelation 22 is clearly reminiscent of paradise. It is true that Genesis does not explicitly speak of 'life-giving' water. On the other hand, it is clear that its spring must have provided an enormous amount of water, for it is the headwaters of four streams. This was simply 'water', necessary for plant growth; it was not the life-giving water, protecting people from death, and providing eternal life.

Genesis tells us about the water supply of the garden of Eden. It 'waters' the garden, so to speak (Rev. 2:10-14). The water comes 'from Eden'. Leaving Eden, the water flows past the paradise garden; from there it splits into the headwaters of four separate rivers, each with their own name: Pishon, Gihon, Tigris and Euphrates. In this way, the blessings of Eden – life and fertility – are distributed over the earth. The Pishon and the Gihon no longer exist today; scholars think that in the passage of the ages their flow has dried up. However, it is clear from the account of Genesis 2 that these four main rivers of the world, no matter where we would place them geographically, all arise from one and the same source, located upstream of the paradise garden of God.³⁰

²⁹ See Isa. 34:5; Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 21:10, 14-22; Zeph. 2:12.

³⁰ For an attempt to locate the paradise, by means of the four rivers mentioned in Genesis, on a site just north of the Persian Gulf, see: K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 428-430. However, his translation 'winds through' (just like the NIV), instead of

The apocryphal book Jesus Sirach adds to these four rivers the Jordan and the Nile, in a symbolic reference to the overwhelming riches of the Torah. The Law is a stream of wisdom, knowledge and instruction. “It [the law] overflows, like the Pishon, with wisdom – like the Tigris in the days of the new fruits. It runs over, like the Euphrates, with understanding, like the Jordan at harvest time. It sparkles like the Nile with knowledge, like the Gihon at vintage time” (Sir. 24:25-27). The addition of the Jordan (in Israel) and the Nile (in Egypt) brings the water supply of paradise very close to its later readers.

What about the precious stones that will adorn the new Jerusalem with their colourful brilliance? These gems are a remarkable touch in John’s visionary portrayal of the city. The city itself – including its streets – is of pure gold (Rev. 21:18, 21). Gates, walls, foundations: everything in the city of God shines with resplendent glory. The beauty and splendour of these precious stones, which already described God’s glorious presence in an earlier vision (Rev. 4:3), stands in shrill contrast to the gaudy glitter which decks the great prostitute of Babylon (Rev. 17:4-5). Isaiah had already prophesied about the restoration of God’s chosen bride, Jerusalem. To her, the LORD himself had said: “O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones” (Isa. 54:11-12).³¹

The link between precious stones and paradise rivers is a rather puzzling passage in Ezekiel. In this prophecy, the king of Tyre, who regards himself as a god (Ezek. 28:2), enjoys a life comparable to that of the first humans: “You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared” (Ezek. 28:13). It is striking that of the twelve gemstones attached to the high priest’s breastpiece, nine are listed here (Ex. 28:17-20; 39:10-13);³² gold is mentioned separately. A paradisiac state, portrayed in the well-known palette of colours: the brilliance of gemstones and of gold.³³

This takes us back to Genesis 2:11-12. The four rivers of paradise produce sedimentary deposits. Carried along by the water, the various rocks and minerals form deposits – including precious stones – in the alluvial plains. The Pishon winds around the land of Havilah (the ‘sandy region’): gold is found there. Most exegetes identify Havilah with the Arabian peninsula (Gen. 25:18 and 1 Sam. 15:7). In that case, the Pishon, which flows through the land, could correspond to the Persian Gulf and the

‘flows around’ in verse 11 is questionable. The geographical details from Genesis 2 indicate at least that the region where the paradise was laid even after the Flood actually could be located.

³¹ Both the apocryphal book of Tobit (Tob. 13:17) and the so-called ‘new Jerusalem texts’ from Qumran (2Q24; 4Q554; 4Q555; 5Q15; 11Q18) make mention of the use of precious stones in the walls, streets and squares of the eschatological Jerusalem.

³² Actually, the Septuagint lists all twelve gemstones in Ezek. 28:13.

³³ In Ezek. 31:18, Pharaoh is compared to the fair trees of Eden. Cf. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), 133-134.

Red Sea together. Some exegetes, however, have suggested an identification of Havilah with India. In any case, the gold of Havilah is of outstanding quality (see the note in Gen. 2:12); aromatic resin and onyx stones are found there as well.

This is rare, a land of pure gold and a variety of precious stones; the wealth of the faraway land of Havilah was not found anywhere else. But in the new city of God, these riches are freely available to all its inhabitants. Water, gemstones and gold: a paradisiac combination, promising a princely life of glorious splendour.

7. The removal of the dragon-serpent: the paradise curse lifted

In John's visions, there are three references to the serpent of paradise. It is 'the serpent of old', the first snake, the snake from the beginning (ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος: Rev. 12:9; 20:2; cf. 12:15). He has grown into an enormous red bloodthirsty dragon-serpent, strikingly similar to the beast John sees arising from the sea in the next chapter (Rev. 13:1). In John's description, this great red dragon is a representation of the devil, or Satan (Rev. 12:9; 20:2). Just as he was when he instigated the Fall, he has again become a mortal danger to the woman and her offspring (Rev. 12:15, cf. 12:4).

In the book of Revelation, the serpent of old is portrayed as the 'great deceiver'. He is the one who 'leads the whole world astray'; he 'deceives the nations' (πλανᾷ; Rev. 12:9; 20:2). The book of Genesis tells us that the snake was the craftiest of all the animals. As crafty as he might be, he is and remains a creature. What he did in paradise was 'deceive' (ἀπατᾷν: Gen. 3:13 LXX; cf. 2 Cor. 11:3).

Some translations have the woman declare 'the serpent misled me', for 'to mislead' and 'to deceive' are almost synonymous.³⁴ Genesis may not say so explicitly, but from the New Testament it becomes clear that Satan himself was at work in the snake.

Deception, leading people astray: that too is the tactic of the beast out of the earth (Rev. 13:14, 19:20). He will act as an apocalyptic instrument of Satan (Rev. 20: 8,10). The serpent of old takes on an increasingly monstrous form.

If it is true that John identifies the dragon with the serpent of paradise, then he does something unique. Never before has the snake that deceived man in paradise been explicitly identified with the devil, or Satan.³⁵ At the same time, this representation would no doubt also have evoked mythical associations with the first readers of Revelation, the seven churches in Asia Minor. Bauckham points to the ambiguity in pagan representations of the day: the snake was not only regarded as symbolic of divinity (as in the cult of Asclepios); it also represented opposition to the gods (as with Hercules and the Hydra). Sooner or later, however, hostility towards the gods will lead to punishment. In antiquity, people expected that the dragon-serpent would meet its destruction.³⁶

³⁴ Louw/Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 366-367.

³⁵ For an overview of biblical references to the serpent, see Aune, *Revelation*, 606-607.

³⁶ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 195-198.

Revelation 12 shows how the dragon is removed from heaven and hurled to the earth. Chapter 20 tells that he is to be chained in the abyss for a thousand years; after a short time of release he will finally be thrown into the lake of burning sulphur. In this way, the destruction of the treacherous dragon-serpent is sealed. The source of all deception in the world, the embodiment of all rebellion against the Creator, is to be removed forever from the scene.

With the removal of the dragon, a new world order can appear, a new heaven and a new earth, the new Jerusalem. The promise of the new order is succinctly expressed: ‘there will be no more curse’ (καὶ πᾶν κατάθεμα οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι; Rev. 22:3). This does not mean, as some translations suggest, that in the new Jerusalem nothing accursed will still exist; instead, the divine curse itself has been removed. Zechariah had already prophesied that Jerusalem would be secure from the threat of destruction (because of her sins, Zech. 14:11). In the new Jerusalem, not a soul would wish to resist the Almighty.³⁷ When the instigator of all evil has been removed, it cannot happen again. The death sentence from paradise, which rested as a curse upon all mankind, will be removed, and the tree of life will again be provided. The city of the future will far exceed the lost paradise. ‘There will be no more curse’ – that promises eternal paradise blessings for all the inhabitants of the new Jerusalem.

Back to the future

Throughout the foregoing, we explored a variety of paradise motifs, which trained readers will more or less recognise from Genesis 1-3: the paradise garden of God; the new heaven and the new earth, where there is no sea; God and the Lamb as the eternal source of light; servants who reign as kings; free access to the tree of life; a river of living water, with deposits of precious stones; the removal of the dragon-snake: the paradise curse lifted. The original paradise may have been removed from the face of the earth, but the Old Testament is filled with promises of salvation: the people of God will live in a place like the garden of Eden (Isa. 51:1-3; Ezek. 36:35).

And yet, the book of Revelation does not foretell a return to or restoration of the lost paradise of old. All of the paradise motifs contain indications that in the future, things will be quite different. By way of conclusion, I list the following:

1. Paradise, the garden of Eden, is transformed into a garden city, the new Jerusalem, a dwelling place for all the nations.
2. What is new in the new world, and in the new Jerusalem, remains forever: even the sea (including the grave of seafarers, and the whole power of death) will be gone forever.

³⁷ Pierre Prigent, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean* (Commentaire du Nouveau Testament; Genève: Labor et Fides, 2000), 483; Pilchan Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 291; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 563-564.

3. The light of God's presence will eclipse the light of sun and moon, and will cause day and night to become one. Like an immense skylight God's blessing will spread to all the nations.
4. Humanity will exercise responsibility over the creation, not under God, but together with God and the Lamb. This dominion over the world will last forever.
5. There is free access to the tree of life; apparently, in the new Jerusalem it will have multiplied. There will be no grim watchers guarding access to the tree, but welcoming angels holding all gates wide open.
6. A stream of living water, coming from God, is more than just a source of life: it protects mankind from death. Precious stones and gold are not just found in the far-off land of Havilah, but are part and parcel of the new Jerusalem.
7. The ancient dragon-serpent is removed; forever a thing of the past, and the paradise curse has been changed into eternal blessing.

In short, the book of Revelation shows us a future that far exceeds the past. This future is dominated by the dwelling together of God and man. And that provides endless and undisturbed bliss!

ÖSSZEFOGLALÁS

A Jelenések könyvében több olyan motívumot találunk, amelyek az 1Móz első részeiben található teremtéstörténetre emlékeztetnek. Ez a cikk a vonatkozó igehelyeket hét külön motívumban foglalja össze: 1. A Paradicsom mint Isten kertje; 2. A új tenger nélküli új ég és új föld; 3. Isten és a Bárány mint az örökkévaló fény forrása; 4. Szolgák, akik királyokként uralkodnak; 5. Szabad menetel az élet fájához; 6. Az élet vizének folyama, amelyben drágaköveket lehet találni; 7. A sárkány-kígyó eltávolítása és ezáltal a Paradicsomon levő átok eltűnése. A cikk mind a hét motívumot külön-külön tárgyalja. Minden esetben a Jelenések könyve lesz az a kiindulópont, ahonnan vissza lehet tekinteni a teremtéstörténetre. A tanulmányban természetesen először a Jel és teremtéstörténet közötti azonosságok kerülnek sorra, majd a dolgozat végén, az összefoglalásnál foglalkozik a különbségekkel is.

ABSTRACT

The book of Revelation contains several motifs which remind the reader of the creation story from the first chapters of the book of Genesis. In this article, the relevant textual material will be clustered into seven such motifs: 1. The paradise garden of God; 2. A new heaven and a new earth, where there is no sea; 3. God and the Lamb as the eternal source of light; 4. Servants who reign as kings; 5. Free access to the tree of life; 6. A river of living water, with deposits of precious stones; 7. The removal of the dragon-snake: the paradise curse lifted. Each of these seven motifs will be discussed separately. In every case, the book of Revelation will be the starting point, from which lines are traced back to the book of Genesis. In the discussion, the similarities between Revelation and Genesis are highlighted. By way of conclusion, at the end of the article the differences between them are also identified.

SAMENVATTING

Het boek Openbaring bevat verschillende motieven die de lezer herinneren aan het scheppingsverhaal uit de eerste hoofdstukken van het boek Genesis. In dit artikel worden de relevante tekstgegevens geclusterd tot zeven van zulke motieven: 1. De paradijs tuin van God; 2. De nieuwe hemel en de nieuwe aarde, zonder zee; 3. God en het Lam als eeuwige lichtbron; 4. Dienaren die als koningen heersen; 5. Vrije toegang tot de levensboom; 6. Een rivier van levend water met afzetting van edelgesteente; 7. De uitschakeling van de draakslang: paradijsvloek opgeheven. Elk van deze zeven motieven wordt apart besproken. Telkens is het boek Openbaring het uitgangspunt, om van daaruit terug te kijken naar het boek Genesis. Bij de bespreking staan uiteraard de overeenkomsten tussen Openbaring en Genesis voorop. Aan het slot van dit artikel zullen bij wijze van conclusie ook de verschillen worden benoemd.

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