

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

# New World, New Temple, New Worship: the Book of Revelation in the Theology and Practice of Christian Worship — Part 2

Martyn Cowan

## A preterist account of worship in Revelation

Recent reformulations of the preterist interpretation of Revelation offer great explanatory power to the theology and function of worship in the book of Revelation. A tree is judged by its fruit and the particular preterist interpretation we will describe readily illuminates Revelation and its presentation of worship in an edifying way. In other words, this interpretation shows the mutual explanatory power of worship to Revelation and *vice versa*.

## The presuppositions of this preterist interpretation

This preterist interpretation understands Revelation to describe the end of the old creation that occurred with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 and the arrival of the new creation in the establishment of Christ's millennial kingdom. This hermeneutical approach is shaped by the following convictions regarding the historical context and biblical theology.

(1) The dating of Revelation: As we discussed in Part 1, there are two main possibilities: a date near the end, or just after, Nero; or, considerably later, during Domitian's reign. The external evidence for the late date is far from watertight (particularly given our analysis of the Domitianic persecution hypothesis) and there is compelling external evidence for a date pre-AD70. More importantly, the internal evidence supports the idea of John focusing on the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem: (i) John bookends his material with references to the events in view being 'near' (1:1, 3, 19; 3:10-11; 22:6-7, 10, 12, 20) and this, coupled with his addressing seven specific congregations, suggests that the events find their referent in the near future; (ii) much of the book is Jewish in language and character, e.g. its emphasis on the tribes and temple and also John's use of the Hebrew Bible; (iii) there are a

number of possible allusions to the events of the 60s—e.g. 666 referring to Nero or references to the events of the Jewish war.

(2) Elsewhere in the New Testament the event that is ‘near’ is the destruction of the temple (Matt. 23:34-38; 24:34; Luke 24:20-32; Heb. 10:25; 13:13-14). In Revelation 11:1-2, it appears that the temple is still standing and John alludes to Luke 21:24 where Jerusalem is to be ‘trampled underfoot’.

(3) In AD30 Jesus prophesied that judgement would come within a generation viz., forty years (Mark 13:30). Jesus predicted that the days before Jerusalem fell would be marked by war, earthquakes, famines and false messiahs; all such things are found in Acts (Acts 4:31; 5:36-37; 11:28; 16:25) and corroborated by Josephus. In this transitional period, the gospel went ‘to the Jew first’ as Jews and God-fearers were called to transfer their allegiance to Christ (Acts 3:25; Rom. 9:4-5). Those who remained in unbelief would be judged on the testimony of two witnesses, i.e. Jesus and the Spirit testifying through the apostles’ preaching (Luke 12:10). Those who rejected their Christ would be cut off from the covenant people (*laos*) and become a mere *ethnos* or (pagan) nation (Acts 3:22-23; cf. Lev. 23:29; Deut. 18:15, 18-19).

(4) This judgement is spoken of in the language of Old Testament prophecy. Repeatedly, the prophets spoke of judgement in terms of the earth being shaken, the stars falling and the sun and moon being darkened. Babylon is the example *par excellence* of what happens to an evil city (Isa. 13:10; Jer. 51:25, 42). Furthermore, such cosmic judgement language is used to describe the destruction of a nation by war, (cf. e.g. Ezek. 32:4-12 and Isa. 19:1-4). Jesus prophesied that a drowning flood would sweep over the temple mount, in effect casting it into the sea (Mark 11:22-3). Interestingly, the language of an overwhelming flood is also used by the prophets to describe a foreign military invasion (Isa. 8:7; Jer. 47:2).

(5) AD70 was, from an important perspective, the end of the old world and the beginning of the new. Jerusalem was a temple with a city built around it. When the worship centre is destroyed the civilisation based around it also passes away. Correspondingly, when a new worship centre is established a new world flows out from it. The new creation began at Pentecost when the resurrected Christ poured out his Spirit on the church. From then on it was only a matter of time before the old creation was brought to an end (Acts 2:17; 1 Cor. 10:11; 1 John 2:18). Thus, the ‘last days’ in question is not the inter-advent period but the last days of the Jewish world. Assuming that the tabernacle-temple is a ‘microcosm’ of the world,<sup>1</sup> the destruction of the sanctuary (which was, biblically, at the centre of the world) marked the end of

a world. Thus, Revelation describes the judgement which ‘punctuates the close of the old order’, and the consequential breakthrough into a new world.<sup>2</sup>

(6) The Jewish problem was idolatrous nationalism. The clearing of the temple was not primarily a protest about economic corruption but a prophecy concerning its destruction.<sup>3</sup> This ‘den of robbers’ was becoming a centre for insurrectionists. Rather than being a house of prayer for all nations (Isa. 56:6-8; cf. Lev. 22:18-25; Num. 15:14-16), God-fearing Gentiles were kept out (Acts 21:17-19). The desolating sacrilege occurred when nationalism led the Jewish troops to turn the temple into a deified fortress during their rebellion against Rome.<sup>4</sup>

(7) The persecution in the apostolic church was predominantly Jewish in character. Throughout Acts, it is the Jews who stir up opposition to the church and frequently it is the Romans who protect the church—Roman persecution only began with Nero in AD64.<sup>5</sup> Israel, in a Babylonian manner, sought to destroy both Christ (the ultimate temple) and his church, the true temple.

(8) In AD30-70 a new temple is being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets whose preaching gathered living stones around Christ, the chief cornerstone (Mark 12:10). The old temple, like the tabernacle at Shiloh before it, was corrupt and so would be replaced by a far greater sanctuary. Fascinatingly, Leithart, building on Acts 15:16-17, understands this period to correspond to the liturgical revolution associated with David’s undivided tent before the construction of the Solomonic temple.<sup>6</sup>

(9) It is context that must determine if *ge* is to be translated as ‘earth’ or ‘land’. Thus, the language which some assume could only instead refer to cataclysmic judgement coming on the world at the end of history could refer to a judgement coming upon the Land [of Israel].

(10) John and Revelation tell one complete story, rather like Luke–Acts. John is describing the establishment of the new creation where the bridegroom meets his bride. The old temple is destroyed and the resurrected lamb is tabernacle–temple (John 1–2; Rev. 19–22). Both books are chiasmic, the centres being John 12 (Christ’s hour of glory and the judgement of the prince of this world) and Revelation 12 (the casting out of Satan as Jesus is exalted to rule with a rod of iron).<sup>7</sup>

### **A preterist interpretation of Revelation**

Having seen some of the key presuppositions that our preterist hermeneutic brings to Revelation, we move on to discuss the book itself. If this interpretive approach is correct, then we would expect to find described, in language rich

in Old Testament symbolism: a transition from one world to another; by means of a climactic judgement on the old world centred on the temple; and resulting in the inauguration of an alternative order of worship in a new temple.

**On the Lord's Day John encounters Christ as the priest in the sanctuary**  
We will argue that, in the initial setting of chapter 1, Christ is presented as both priest and sanctuary through a number of allusions to some of the other sanctuaries described in Scripture, namely the Garden of Eden, Mount Sinai, the tabernacle-temple, and the throne visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel.

John 'in Spirit on the Lord's Day' hears 'a voice like a trumpet'. This may mean that he is possessed by the Spirit or that he is in the realm of the Spirit's operation, i.e. in the assembly of God's people.<sup>8</sup> Although the trumpet has multiple pertinent allusions,<sup>9</sup> here it is instructive to remember the trumpet at Sinai calling the people to the covenantal worship service of Exodus 19-24.

Turning, John sees one 'like a son of man' walking among the lampstands. Given that the sanctuary lampstands of the Old Testament were like 'watcher trees', here is an Edenic vision of a garden sanctuary where Christ, perhaps both as the Lord and as Adam, walks in the garden in 'the spirit of the day' (Gen. 3:8). Just as God came on the Sabbath to evaluate Adam and Eve, Christ appears and is about to evaluate his churches (Gen. 3:8; Rev. 2-3). These echoes of Eden and Sinai indicate that this is holy ground. In this setting, Christ is dressed as the high priest on the Day of Atonement wearing linen and with his feet bare (Lev. 16:4). Perhaps he is girded around the chest and wearing the golden ephod because his work is done (Exod. 28:8; Lev. 16:4). The keys may symbolise that this particular priest has been elevated to the throne (Isa. 22). Christ is about to clean, trim and refuel the lamps around him with the sword projecting from his mouth. The various descriptions of Christ in 1:13-18 recur in the opening words of the seven letters and form the basis of the evaluations.

This kingly priest is also the sanctuary. The imagery describing him (1:12-16) is drawn from the tabernacle-temple, in particular, the metals used in its construction. Just as there were similarities between the sanctuary and the high priest because the same materials were used in the curtains, veils and priestly garments, so here we are pointed to Christ as the tabernacle-temple (cf. 21:22).

### John's vision of the heavenly throne room

John had been told to write what he saw. After the letters, John looks and, like Moses, sees the true heavenly sanctuary (Rev. 4; cf. Exod. 25:9, 40; 26:30). In a manner analogous to Solomon, John receives the plans for the new temple (1 Chron. 28:9-11). Soon, like Ezekiel, he will be sent out to prophesy the destruction of the present Jerusalem before being given a vision of the new one (Ezek. 40-48).

There are, however, very important differences to previous encounters. Preceding visions were viewed from earth's side of the firmament. For instance, in Exodus 24 the elders of Israel saw the clear blue sapphire pavement on which God stood (Exod. 24:10). It was 'like the very substance of the heavens in its clarity'. Perhaps we should think of it as a 'slab' of sky, i.e. part of the firmament, on which God descended in order to eat with his people. Isaiah saw the hem of the robe filling the temple and only glimpsed a high and exalted throne. Ezekiel saw a high throne, coloured lapis lazuli, above the firmament dome and he described an individual similar to the person in Revelation 1:12-16. What is striking about John's vision is that he is called up to the other side of the firmament, i.e. onto the sea of glass and into heaven itself.

He sees the very throne room of God of which the earthly tabernacle and temple were only copies (Exod. 25:8-9; Heb. 8:5). In the inter-testamental period there was a widespread belief that the tabernacle-temple was a copy of God's dwelling in heaven. In the Jewish apocalypses, prophets sometimes were presented as having been transported into heaven.<sup>10</sup> Now John is called up by Christ himself to witness the unfolding drama.

The throne, the original of the 'footstool' ark,<sup>11</sup> is the first thing John sees. It is surrounded by the four living creatures reminiscent of the cherubim on the ark and woven into various curtains (Exod. 26:1, 31). They are like the guards of the Edenic sanctuary and the creatures who supported the throne in Ezekiel's vision.

John mentions the seven-torch lampstand and the crystal sea (4:5-6). This lampstand corresponds to the seven-branched menorah (Lev. 24:1-4; Exod. 27:20-21).<sup>12</sup> The crystal sea represented the waters above the firmament and corresponds, on earth, to the bronze sea or laver mounted off the ground by twelve bulls.<sup>13</sup>

Those familiar with the layout of the earthly sanctuary would have also noticed what appeared to be missing. First, there is no veil (Exod. 40:1-3, cf. Mark 15:38). Secondly, although the golden altar of incense is not mentioned (Exod. 40:26-17), what that altar represented is seen in the elders passing in front of the throne to offer prayer and praise like incense. We may infer that the incense offered on earth was to represent this perpetual practice before the heavenly throne. Thirdly, the bronze altar, which was symbolically a holy mountain from earth to heaven, is not necessary because John has already ascended into the heavenly court by being given access through an open door. Fourthly, given the presence, or understandable absence, of the other pieces of furniture, the fact that there is no table and showbread is startling.

### The identity of the twenty-four elders

The scene has now been set, and we have been introduced to the priestly king and the cherubic living creatures around the throne. Before observing the unfolding drama, we will discuss the identity of the elders. We will argue that the elders are ‘celestial beings of a rank superior to the angels in general’.<sup>14</sup> They should not be understood as representative of all believers in the old and new covenant.<sup>15</sup> We labour this point because of its centrality to our thesis since the transition Revelation describes, centres around the activity of these elders.

Their identity will be determined in part by identifying both the singers and the object of their song in 5:9. Most of the evidence suggests the inclusion of *hemas* either before, after, or instead of *toi Theoi*.<sup>16</sup> This would clarify the object of redemption and, since angels are not redeemed, exclude identifying the elders with a class of angel. For instance, the TR, followed by the KJV and NJKV, renders verse 9 ‘thou...hast redeemed us to God’. Only two manuscripts, Codex Alexandrinus and the Ethiopic Version, omit *hemas* and many, including NA26 favour this abrupt, shorter, and more difficult reading which makes *ek pases phyles kai glosses kai laou kai ethnous* the object of the lamb’s redeeming activity; hence the ESV ‘you ransomed people for God’. This translation would allow this to be the song of angels. Furthermore, *hemas* in verse 9 would be inconsistent with the better-attested *autous* in verse 10. Nevertheless, the TR does include the improbable variant *hemas* in verse 10. Thus, when the external and internal evidence are considered together, verses 9-10 are best understood as the song of angels concerning those whom the lamb has redeemed from humanity.

The other arguments advanced by those who contend that the elders are representatives of the church in heaven are as follows: (1) Nowhere else does 'elder' refer to angel; (2) rather, the title 'elder' refers to those who 'have rule and representation within the Church';<sup>17</sup> (3) the elders are on thrones and earlier Christians were described as those reigning with Christ (1:6), wearing crowns (2:10; 3:11) having been granted kingly authority with him over the nations (2:26-27), with the prospect of apostates soon bowing before them (3:9); (4) Mathison, noting the twenty-four divisions of priests in 1 Chron. 24-25, links the elders with those described as priests to God (1:6).<sup>18</sup> (5) Prigent maintains that the elders are the just of the Old Testament, i.e. those like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with whom Christ promises his followers will share in the banquet of heaven.<sup>19</sup>

By way of critique, while the first argument is cautionary, the second, once unpacked, actually fits with the elders as angels. This is because, as we shall argue, in the old world angels ruled the creation and also represented humanity before God's throne. The last three arguments do not challenge our contention because the things appealed to as present realities actually are what is promised to the churches, i.e. they will receive these benefits in the near future.

The following arguments support the elders being angels—

- (1) angels are very common in apocalyptic literature;
- (2) in 5:8 the elders offer the prayers of God's saints which in 8:3 is an angelic function.<sup>20</sup>
- (3) the new song of the 144,000 cannot be sung by even the elders (14:3);<sup>21</sup>
- (4) spatially, 7:9-11 suggests a number of concentric rings around the throne, i.e. the living creatures, elders and the angelic host;
- (5) the elders and living creatures appear to relate to God and be engaged in worship on the same terms;<sup>22</sup> correspondingly, in 11:17-18 the elders refer to the saints and the destroyers of the earth with equal detachment.<sup>23</sup>
- (6) Finally, Jordan may be correct in identifying twenty-four spirit angels in the rest of the book.<sup>24</sup> This would involve understanding some of the references to angels as referring, not to the twenty-four spirit angels, but to human angels. These will include the pastors of the churches who are the angels of the new covenant and 'another angel,' the Angel of the Lord, viz. the Lord Jesus. For instance, the 'other angel' from chapter 10 is described in a way so similar to the presentation of Christ in chapter 1 that this angel is Jesus. Thus, of the six angels in Revelation 14, four are

understood to be from the number of the twenty-four elders.

Interestingly, they are arranged chiastically:

- a. The 'other Angel' viz. Jesus, the Angel of the Lord as in 8:1-5
- b. Archangel 14:8
- c. Archangel 14:9
- d. Jesus as Man 14:14
- c' Archangel 14:15
- b' Archangel 14:17
- a' The 'other Angel,' again Jesus 14:18.

The actions of the entire twenty-four elders are also ordered chiastically:

- A. One Strong Angel (5:2)
- B. Seven Trumpet Angels ( ch. 8-11)
- C. Four Leading Angels (9:14-15; also 7:1-2)
- C' Four Judging Angels (14:8, 9, 15, 17 and 19)
- B' Seven Bowl Angels (ch. 15-16)
- A' One Strong Angel (18:21).

Of those twenty-four, the seven bowl angels include:

- a. The prophetic/interpreter angel (1:1; 17:1,7; 19:9-10; 21:9; 22:6, 8, 16)<sup>25</sup>
- b. The water angel (16:5)
- c. The solar angel (19:17)

The argument that the elders are angels is important because, as we have just seen, they are absolutely key participants. The angelic elders are presented as having a Levitical identity. The chiasm of 4:3b-4a parallels the emerald rainbow with the Levites. Emerald was Levi's stone and, corresponding to the number of the elders, the Levites existed in twenty-four orders: (1) twenty-four orders of Levites served in the Temple (1 Chron. 24); (2) the Levitical musicians were divided into twenty-four similar groups (I Chron. 25); (3) there were twenty-four Levitical gatekeepers (1 Chron. 26); and (4) Ezekiel saw twenty-four men serving in the temple (Ezek. 8:16).

Furthermore, the elders have a priestly function: (1) like priests, they offer incense; (2) like Levitical musicians, they have harps and engage in choral worship; (3) they function as guards and gatekeepers of God's throne; and (4)

they wear white garments as the High Priest did when serving before the representative throne in the Most Holy Place. Therefore, the elders are the heavenly original of the Levitical priesthood.

We contend that the stage set in chapter four is the setting for a drama which begins in the old creation: angels, not humanity, are found around the throne. As we shall see, the unfolding drama heralds the establishment of the new creation where humanity is granted access and seated around the throne.. As we shall see, one of the blessings of the new creation is that humanity is granted access and seated around the throne.

In biblical theology, the Old Creation was a time of infancy and immaturity. Angels set up and managed the old creation and humanity was placed under their direction and governance. For instance, the Law was given through angels (Heb. 2:2; Acts 7:53) and throughout the Old Testament the Angel of the Lord guided God's people. In the New Creation, humanity comes of age and, consequently, the people of God are told that they will judge even angels (1 Cor. 6:3); presumably this involves judging fallen angels, like Lucifer, who rebelled against their charge as the superintendents of man (Rom. 16:20). Humanity's maturation and change of role in respect of angels comes about because the man Jesus Christ has been raised up above even the angels; and, by virtue of believers being united with the ascended Christ, they also share in his rule and judgement.

Returning to Revelation 5, there is weeping because, to date, no man was worthy to open and implement the scroll. Suddenly everything changes. This is because the priestly king (1:13-18) has, in the manner of Hebrews 7:26-27 and 9:14, offered himself as a Lamb in the whole burnt offering and ascended into heaven before the throne.<sup>26</sup> The elders break out in a new song with all creation to testify to the work of Christ and its consequences for humanity (5:9-10). The man Jesus Christ has been exalted over the angels and he will dominate the rest of the book (Heb.2:5-9).

Christ's exaltation has consequences for all redeemed humanity. By opening the heavenly sanctuary 'Christ achieved a revolution at the sanctuary'.<sup>27</sup> Those redeemed in the ultimate Exodus become priests who reign. Since the new age has dawned, the angelic elders, presumably for the last time as the guardians

of the old creation, cast down their crowns. Then Christ sends them out to perform acts of judgement. Since it is only appropriate to exercise judgement over what is committed into one's care, the world they are judging is the old creation. Jerusalem, which is called Sodom and Egypt will, like her namesakes, be visited in judgement by angels who include the angel of death.<sup>28</sup>

### The opening and proclamation of the scroll

When the seals on the scroll are broken, the book of the kingdom will be opened and the trumpet angels will proclaim its contents. Then, the bowl-angels implement the judgements that end the old world and bring about the blessing and privileges of the new. The temple is then decisively opened and redeemed humanity is enthroned as priests and kings. Consequently, angels and men are fellow servants.

As the seals are being opened, the saints do not yet enjoy full access to the heavenly court. In the description of the fifth seal they are pictured 'under the altar' (6:9). In the cosmology suggested by biblical typology, the altar of incense signifies the firmament heaven. This is, symbolically, the place called 'Abraham's bosom' the *limbus partum* where the Old Testament saints waited; although a place of blessing, it was outside heaven proper (Luke 16:22). With the seal broken, they are given the white robe necessary to ascend to the highest heaven. As martyrs, they cry for justice and vindication but are told to wait a little longer until their number is complete, after which the Lord will avenge their blood. They were not martyred for their testimony to Christ since they are the old covenant martyrs. Those subsequently martyred later die for their testimony to Christ (12:17; 14:12; 19:10). Consequently, when we meet the enthroned saints after this period of transition, all faithful martyrs are present; martyred because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the Word of God (20:4).

As the sixth seal is cut, the old creation seemed to fall apart but it is stopped so that angels can seal the faithful before judgement falls on a corrupt temple (cf. Ezek. 9:4). Those sealed are a symbolically perfect 144,000 Jewish converts and, together with a great multitude from among the Gentiles, represent the martyrs who persevere through the Great Tribulation. They are shown before the throne, not around it as yet (7:9). The seventh seal corresponds to Pentecost as the Angel of the Lord pours his Spirit out constituting his church

as the new temple. The scroll having been opened, there is silence as all anticipate its proclamation. The trumpets sound out warning blasts of the judgement against, *inter alia*, the land (8:7), the temple mountain (8:8-9)<sup>29</sup> and the temple's far-reaching influence symbolised by 'springs of water' (8:10; cf. Gen. 2:10-14; Ezek. 47).

The sixth trumpet announces the martyrdom that will complete the number of martyrs from the old creation (10:6). This is tied to John eating the scroll. Initially it tastes sweet because of the prophetic ministry enjoyed by the apostles and prophets whose preaching seals the church. It turns bitter presumably because John glimpses his own death (11:7-10). Jerusalem is responsible because these deaths occur 'in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified' (11:8).

The seventh trumpet finishes the proclamation of the kingdom. For the last time the angelic governors of the old creation speak from their thrones to declare the manifestation of Christ's eternal kingdom. Before the bowls implement what the trumpets proclaimed, there is a symbolic interpretation of the events associated with the arrival of the kingdom (11:19-15:4).

### The events that occurred as the book was opened and proclaimed

Satan is cast down and takes up residence in Jerusalem. He persecutes the church until she is carried away (12:13-14, cf. Acts 8:1). The 'water' that now flowed from this temple was bitter and corrupting false teaching that many Jews accepted (12:15-16, cf. 8:11). Satan tried to turn the Romans, who throughout Acts protected the church against Christians. Thus, he calls up the Roman sea beast (12:17-13:1). This corresponds to AD64 when the Romans began persecuting the church.

The land beast is the false prophet who counterfeits Pentecost by calling fire from heaven (8:5; 13:14, cf. Lev. 9:24; 2 Chron. 7:1; Acts 2). This may correspond to the completion of Herod's Temple in AD64 which, as Josephus records, revived the nationalistic thoughts of rebellion against Rome.<sup>30</sup>

The Jews worshipped the visible political power of the sea beast. In fact, it seems that the land beast shares the number of the sea beast. In Hebrew, 'Nero Caesar' is calculated as 666.<sup>31</sup> The Jewish leaders, in contrast to Jesus the true

temple builder, have the number of Solomon's rebellion;<sup>31</sup> they are little Solomonic kings who, in thirst for power, lose their kingdom. Those who did not share their nationalism are forbidden to 'buy or sell'. The idea of liturgical transaction was introduced in 3:18. Buying and selling of animals was a normal part of temple life; those who do not share this nationalistic ideology were not allowed to participate in the temple or synagogue (Matt. 10:17; 23:34; Mark 13:9; Luke 4:28-29; 21:12; Acts 22:19).

Some who would not worship the beast are killed (13:15). However, these people had already received another mark (7:3). Their deaths, along with those from the great multitude upon whom the beast 'made war,' had great meaning because they completed the number of the old creation martyrs.<sup>32</sup> The waiting was over and those on the holy mountain (14:1), together with those under the altar, ascend to the highest heaven (15:2).

Christ is so sovereign over this martyrdom that it is presented as a harvest of wheat and the vine of true Israel.<sup>33</sup> As a harvest of first-fruits, a sheaf was taken up and waved before the Lord (Rev. 14:4, cf. Lev. 23:9-21). Then Christ treads the vintage (cf. 19:2, 13). These martyrs are like a tribute offering which used both grain and a libation of wine. This harvest of grain brings humanity into the throne room; essentially the showbread of the sanctuary, representing the true Israel, has appeared. They stand beside the sea of glass and engage in priestly service (15:2-3 cf. 5:8-9). Their innocent blood, which has spread over the whole land, cries out for justice.<sup>34</sup> To this, the martyrs raise the song of Moses calling down vindicatory covenant curses on those responsible (15:3, cf. 6:10; 11:18).<sup>35</sup>

As at the major feast, the outer curtain opens (15:5). There is no veil in the sanctuary and signs of God's presence are seen within the Holy of Holies (cf. Exod. 19; 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-13; Isa. 6:1-6).<sup>36</sup> Unlike Ezekiel 43:1-12, the glory already resides in this sanctuary, so the cloud consecrates those who have just entered. The symbolic pictures finished, we are back to where we paused at 11:19. The bowls implement the judgement of the old city and the harlot.

The bowls pour out the judgements. The first bowl pours out leprosy as a mark of exclusion from the temple. Now that the Firstfruits church of Jews and Gentiles has been gathered in, fittingly, the second bowl definitively destroys

the sea which, typologically, represented the Jew/Gentile divide (the new distinction is between those inside or outside the city). The third bowl falls on the poisonous waters that flowed from the temple. The fourth is a reversal of blessing and, since the sun represents authorities, perhaps corresponds to increasingly oppressive Roman rule. The fifth bowl perhaps refers to Rome being kept from speaking against the church (13:14-17).<sup>38</sup> The sixth dries up the Euphrates, opening the way for the saints to leave this land under judgement and head to the mountain of assembly (Gen. 19, Exod. 19; Ezek. 38-40).<sup>39</sup> The seventh drains the cup of wrath and Jerusalem is decreed (18:21-23).

Jerusalem was an apostate bride drunk on the blood of the true bride.<sup>40</sup> In this judgement, the husband avenged his murdered bride. As a harlot, she is stoned (16:21).<sup>41</sup> Previously, she had been riding on the back of the beast pursuing the church;<sup>42</sup> now that Roman beast turns against her and destroys her in the Jewish war.<sup>43</sup>

Jerusalem is judged with fire. In the lamentation, the leaders of the land are (ironically) styled 'kings'; although they had no king, these men stood firmly in the line of their wicked predecessors. Like Solomon, they have established the temple in Jerusalem and their 'trade' involves 'horses': the thing that caused Solomon's downfall.<sup>44</sup> The 'merchants' lament because temple worship will cease along with the liturgical transaction associated with it.<sup>45</sup> The seafarers are, presumably, Gentile God-fearers who rejected the kingdom. We re-encounter some of their cargo in the materials used in the construction of the new temple.<sup>46</sup>

### The new woman and the new city

Now, in complete contrast but with the same formula, the angel introduces the bride. This virgin bride, woven together from Jew and Gentile, is ready and so the marriage supper begins. At the same time, heaven opens and Jesus rides forth with his armies to conquer the beast and the false prophet (19:11-16). Thus, simultaneously, we are presented with two meals; the marriage supper and supper of God.

There are three contrasting parallels: prostitute/beast/Babylon (17:1-19:10) and bride/lamb/new Jerusalem (19:11-22:21). This woman, animal and city

yield to another woman, another city, through another animal (the lamb). With Satan bound, the millennium begins with the ascended saints enthroned with Christ and given authority to judge. In this period, both the deceased saints and Christians live and reign (20:4).

The new heavens and earth came about through the decreation of the old Jewish order (cf. Jer. 4:23-31; Heb. 12:25-29; 2 Pet. 3). The aging old covenant era, which had grown old and obsolete, toppled and disappeared (Heb. 8:13) leaving the unshakeable kingdom. Therefore, the things described are present realities and 'not wholly future'; 'that which is to be absolutely and completely true in eternity is definitively and progressively true now.'<sup>47</sup> Life in the New Jerusalem is a millennial reality.<sup>48</sup> The writer to the Hebrews says, 'You have come to Mt. Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem' (Heb. 12:22). In this holy city the covenant finds fulfilment as God dwells among his people.<sup>49</sup>

Night has passed with the dawn of day in this city which, having walls of jasper, is the throne of God (4:3; 21:11, 18). The transition that has occurred makes possible an incredible degree of access. Symbolically, the main tabernacle-temple sanctuary was suspended over the altar with the heavenly laver waters separating them. Since there is no more heavenly sea, the temple-city sanctuary comes down to earth. That sea of glass which corresponded to the waters above the firmament (4:6) is now the stuff of which the streets of the city are made. There is no sanctuary that divides or separates and so there is no temple dividing God from his people because they are his temple (21:22-23 cf. John 14:23; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22).

Under the new covenant, the apostles and tribal heads replace the twenty-four elders and the throne is guarded by men. Angelic superiority was a temporary arrangement—now an angel is John's fellow servant (19:10) and, intriguingly, there is now no difference between the angelic and human world (21:17). The gates of the city are guarded by the angels who are the pastors of the church (chs. 2-3). The foundation stones of the walls are the apostles (Eph. 2:20; Matt. 16:18). As with the old temple, and the Edenic sanctuary, the foundations are costly stones (1 Kings 5:17; Isa. 54:11-12; Gen. 2:10-12; Ezek. 28:13). Like the temple of old, the temple-city is made of purest gold and its cubic nature resembles the Holy of Holies. All the inhabitants are in priestly service; like Aaron, they have a name on their foreheads.

A stream of life-giving water flows from God's throne, bringing new life to the world. This is the city set on a hill that Jesus commanded the church to be (Matt. 5:14-16; Phil. 2:15). The gates, which enable people to come from all four points of the compass, never shut and converts stream in.

Therefore, we conclude that this final vision is not, as is often claimed, of heavenly worship but rather describes the reality of worship in the new temple. As such, Revelation records the unrepeatable transitional events that established worship in the sanctuary of the new covenant.

MARTYN COWAN is the Assistant Minister of First Saintfield Presbyterian Church, Co.Down. This article is adapted from his MTh dissertation from Oak Hill.

#### ENDNOTES

1. P. J. Leithart, *A House For My Name* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2000), p. 85. V. S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1991), p. 28.
2. K. L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, p. 336.
3. M. Horne, *The Victory According to Mark* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), p. 152; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, pp. 158 ff.
4. Horne, *The Victory According to Mark*, p. 167. C. van der Waal, *The Covenantal Gospel*, p. 118. This also helps us see that business in the courts of the temple was actually a necessary part of temple life. The relevance of this will be shown as we consider what is meant by the language of buying and selling in Revelation.
5. F. W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity* (London: Cassell, 1882), pp. 437f; M. S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 466ff; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*, p. 374.
6. P. J. Leithart, *From Silence to Song* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), pp. 96-8.
7. See the work of W.A. Gage, on the John-Revelation project at [www.knoxseminary.org](http://www.knoxseminary.org).
8. U. Vanni, "Liturgical Dialogue in Revelation," *New Testament Studies* 37 (1991): 348-72, has suggested that 1:1-8 reflected an early Christian liturgical dialogue and this, coupled with the fact that there is second century evidence of Sundays being called the Lord's Day, would suggest that this is a Sunday.
9. For instance, the trumpets that announced the fall of the city of Jericho and the trumpet that sounded ten days before the year of Jubilee (Rev. 2:10). For a description of the symbolic significance of trumpets see Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, pp. 234-5.
10. R. J. McKelvey, *The New Temple*, pp. 25-41; R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, "The Temple

- and the Origins of Jewish Apocalyptic,” *Vetus Testamentum* 20 (1970): 1-15.
11. M. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: OUP, 1978), pp. 246-59 argues that the ark showed structural similarities to the footstool of a king.
  12. V. S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, p. 18.
  13. J. B. Jordan, *Behind the Scenes: Orientation in the Book of Revelation*, p. 10; P. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 230. V. S. Poythress, *The Returning King*, p. 104.
  14. N. B. Stonehouse, “The Elders and the Living-Beings in the Apocalypse,” *Paul before the Areopagus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 90.
  15. Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, p. 177. K. A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism* (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1999), p. 147.
  16. G. K. Beale, *Revelation*, p. 360.
  17. Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, p. 151. See also K. A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, p. 147.
  18. K. A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, p. 147.
  19. P. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 229.
  20. N. B. Stonehouse, “The Elders and the Living-Beings in the Apocalypse,” p. 103.
  21. However, if the 144,000 are not, as we shall argue, to be identified with the whole number of the redeemed, then a body representative of all believers would not necessarily be able to sing this song.
  22. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
  23. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
  24. J.B. Jordan, *A Brief Reader's Guide to Revelation*, pp. 25, 37.
  25. A similar angel acts in Dan. 10:10-21; Ezek. 43:6; Zech. 1:9, 19; 2:3.
  26. This one offering contrasts significantly to that of the priests in Jerusalem who, according to Josephus, *Wars* 6, 423 p. 372, offered 256,000 lambs during the Passover of AD70.
  27. P. J. Leithart, *The Kingdom and the Power* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1993), p. 19.
  28. Gen. 18:16-19:28 and Exod. 12:12.
  29. Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, p. 239 cites W. R. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree* (Sheffield: University of Sheffield Press, 1980), p. 119 who argues that this mountain was a standard expression among the Jewish people for the Temple Mount.
  30. Josephus, *Jewish War*; 2:232-308.
  31. R. J. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), pp. 384-407. K. L. Gentry, “A Preterist View of Revelation,” p. 68. In Hebrew, Nero Caesar was spelt NRWN QSR. The numerical value of the letters was: N=50,

R=200, W=6, N=50, Q=100, S=60 and R=200, the sum of which is 666. For the textual variant in which the cryptogram reads 616 see B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, p. 750.

32. Among his other sins, Solomon collected an extraordinary 666 talents of gold each year (1 Kings 10:14).
33. Nero, the Beast, made war with the saints; as Tacitus records, this claimed the lives of an 'immense number' as Nero 'inflicted unheard-of punishments on those who, detested for their abominable crimes, were vulgarly called Christians' (*Annals* 15.44). Clement described how 'a vast multitude of the elect' were martyred (I Clem. 6).
34. Virtually all commentators regard the grape harvest as a judgement on the wicked. As regards the grain harvest, Swete, Bauckham and Ladd interpret it in a positive way; Aune, Beasley-Murray, Beale and Charles see it as a negative judgement on the wicked. Only Jordan and Leithart regard both as a positive harvest.
35. K. L. Gentry, "A Preterist View of Revelation," p. 72 notes that 'The distance of the blood flow is 1600 stadia, which is roughly the length of the land as a Roman province: The Itenerarum of Antonius Piascenza records Palestine's length as 1664 stadia.'
36. Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, p. 291. Beale, *Revelation*, rejects the preterist view that kriqh/nai may be translated 'to be vindicated' although he admits it is 'theoretically' possible. The Song of Moses probably refers to the Song of Witness taught to the Israelites before entering the Promised Land (Deut. 32). It may also allude to the Song of Exod. 15 because the Lord is about to go out as a warrior and fight.
37. This curtain is mentioned in Exod. 26:36; 40:28; I Macc. 4:51. This opening at the time of the feasts is described in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, under 'Sacrifice' and 'Temple'. See also, Josephus, *Antiquities* 3, pp. 127-29; Babylonian Talmud Yoma 54b.
38. Perhaps this will be brought about by the coming 'chaotic year' of the three emperors. Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, p. 405 cites Tacitus speaking of the 'world-wide convulsions' after Nero's suicide in AD68.
39. Chilton, Mathison and Gentry understand this to be fulfilled in Titus' troops being reinforced across the Euphrates.
40. The Babylonian harlot's clothing is a parody of the Jewish priestly clothing of scarlet, purple, gold and fine linen (Rev. 17:4-5; 18:16; cf. Exod. 28:5-36). The language of harlotry is often used to describe apostate Israel (Isa. 1:21; Jer. 2:20-33; 3:1-3; Ezek. 16, 23; Hos. 9:1).
41. K. L. Gentry, "A Preterist View of Revelation," pp. 51, 73. We believe the seventh bowl was poured in the air to produce the giant hailstones.
42. I. Provan, "Foul Spirits, Fornication and Finance: Revelation 18 From an OT Perspective," pp. 81-100 makes a number of compelling arguments for understanding Babylon to refer to Jerusalem. Rather than identifying Rome and Babylon,

- this shows the alliance between Jerusalem and Rome. See also: K. L. Gentry, "A Preterist View of Revelation," pp. 74-79; P. Gaskell, *Is She Jewish? Is She Roman? The Identity Of The Whore Of Babylon In The Book Of Revelation*, Dissertation for BA (Hons) in Theological and Pastoral Studies, Oak Hill Theological College, 2003.
- 43 J. B Jordan, *Revelation Chapter 14-15, a Preliminary Commentary*, p. 170. The frog demon army, who had gone to enlist the Romans to fight against the church, suddenly found that the Romans had turned against them and destroyed Jerusalem (17:3, 7, 14, 16-17).
  44. I. Provan, "Foul Spirits, Fornication and Finance," p. 95.
  45. J. B. Jordan, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 222. J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, pp. 38, 51 notes that Jerusalem's wealth was widely known; and Josephus *Wars* 6, pp. 337, 368-69 described her 'vast riches' and the 'immense quantity of money' in the temple.
  46. What is left is used in the construction of the temple. This pattern was established with the tabernacle being built with the spoils of Egypt (Exod. 12:35-36) The list in vv. 11-13 alludes to the sanctuaries and palaces of the OT, e.g. Exod. 25:1-8; 30:23-25; 35:4-9; 1 Kings 10:18; 2 Chron. 2:7-14. However, the glory of the new sanctuary is such that more is required. As such, pearls from the Gentile sea are found.
  47. D. Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, p. 538.
  48. The new creation is described in Isa. 65:17-20. Although glorious, it is still marked by sin, age and death. For a helpful discussion see K. A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, pp. 86-8. See also the suggestive comments on R. H. Gundry, "The New Jerusalem: People as Place, not Place for People," pp. 254-64.
  49. J. E. Leonard, "The Concept of Covenant in Biblical Worship," *The Complete Library of Christian Worship* (4 vols., Peabody; Hendrickson, 1993), p. 64. See also R. C. Leonard, "New Testament Vocabulary of Worship," *ibid.*, p. 22.