

## THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL, EARLY CHRISTIAN HERMENEUTICS, AND THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN

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**Abstract:** *This study seeks to demonstrate that John did not interpret the OT promises to Israel as if they had to be fulfilled by ethnic or national Israel in the present or the future. He freely applied such promises to the community of God's people in his time, which was made up of both Jew and Gentile, or to the new creation. For John, God's promises to ethnic and national Israel were fulfilled by the community of both Jews and Gentiles brought into existence by the sacrificial death and resurrection of Israel's Messiah. In the Apocalypse of John, there is no sense that the church (as some Gentile association or organization distinct from God's people) had replaced Israel but that God's renewed people, centered on her Messiah, welcomed Gentiles into Israel's restoration which had begun and would after a period of tribulation culminate in eternal life in God's new creation.*

**Key Words:** *Revelation, Apocalypse of John, hermeneutics, Israel, prophecy, eschatology*

In the mid-twentieth century, the hermeneutical principle of literal interpretation was widely popularized by Charles C. Ryrie, J. Dwight Pentecost, and John F. Walvoord, among others.<sup>1</sup> Robert Thomas's support for a literal interpretation of Revelation in his two-volume commentary has been influential at the popular level.<sup>2</sup> This literal hermeneutic insists that promises to ethnic Israel in the OT must be fulfilled by ethnic Israel in the future. Progressive dispensationalists recognize that a literal-spiritual hermeneutical dichotomy is too simplistic but still tend to favor a

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<sup>1</sup> Charles C. Ryrie writes, "Consistent literalism is at the heart of dispensational eschatology. . . . The literal interpretation of Scripture leads naturally to a second feature—the literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. . . . If the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the promises of the future made to Abraham and David are to be literally fulfilled, then there must be a future period, the millennium, in which they can be fulfilled, for the Church is not now fulfilling them in any literal sense" (*Dispensationalism Today* [Chicago: Moody, 1965], 158). J. Dwight Pentecost writes, "The conclusion must be that the New Testament literal method of fulfillment establishes the literal method as God's method in regard to unfilled [*sic*] prophecy" (*Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958], 61). John F. Walvoord writes, "Scripture should be interpreted in its normative, literal sense, except in such instances where a figurative or nonliteral interpretation is obviously indicated" (*Israel in Prophecy* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962], 30). Cf. Elliot E. Johnson, "A Traditional Dispensational Hermeneutic" in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views* (ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 63–76, 70.

<sup>2</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7* (Chicago: Moody, 1992): 29–39. Cf. Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 323–50.

literal hermeneutic in practice in regard to the future of national and ethnic Israel.<sup>3</sup> All forms of dispensationalism are united by maintaining a distinction between Israel and the church.<sup>4</sup>

Arguments for holding to a literal future fulfillment of God's promises to ethnic and national Israel are motivated by a desire to protect God's integrity by fulfilling the promises as originally given.<sup>5</sup> Craig Blaising draws attention to the performative force of God's original promises and their prophetic reaffirmation: "To postulate a 'fulfillment' of these covenant promises by means of a reality shift in the thing promised overlooks the performative nature of the word of promise, violates the legitimate expectations of the recipients, and brings the integrity of God into question."<sup>6</sup>

Do promises to ethnic Israel need to be fulfilled by ethnic Israel?<sup>7</sup> Is there a future in God's plan for ethnic and national Israel distinct from God's plan for the nations or for Gentile believers? These questions, of course, have produced a mountain of secondary literature and involve a number of issues related to hermeneutics, the continuity of Scripture, and the presence and future of the kingdom; they cannot exhaustively be explored here. Instead, I intend to follow David Turner's wise advice that the future of the discussion must focus on particular instances of the use of the OT in the NT.<sup>8</sup> Gerhard Hasel likewise rightly argues that "as Christian interpreters we cannot interpret the Old Testament as if the New Testament does not exist. As responsible interpreters of the Bible in its entirety we

<sup>3</sup> Craig Blaising notes, "As evangelicals have worked together exploring these developments, the old divisions of spiritual versus literal interpretation have been left behind. Dispensationalists who have simply identified 'literal interpretation,' their traditional label, with historical-grammatical interpretation have become aware of the present-day inapplicability of Ryrie's exclusive hermeneutic" ("Dispensationalism: The Search for a Definition," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition* [ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992], 13–36, 32). Cf. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: Bridgepoint, 1993), 52. John S. Feinberg notes, "The difference is not literalism v. non-literalism, but different understandings of what constitutes literal hermeneutics" ("Systems of Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments* [ed. John S. Feinberg; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988], 63–86, 74). On the future role of national Israel, see Darrell L. Bock, "Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views* (ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 85–101, 92.

<sup>4</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 56.

<sup>5</sup> Darrell L. Bock notes that even though the principle of reading the Bible consistently and literally "is advocated out of an important and sincere concern for the integrity of the text and out of respect for the meaning and inspiration of Scripture, it does not adequately explain what is happening in Scripture" ("Response," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, 76–81, 77).

<sup>6</sup> Craig Blaising, "The Coming Kingdom and Biblical Interpretation," *The Journal of Messianic Jewish Studies* 1 (2015): 100. Cf. Craig Blaising, "A Critique of Gentry and Wellum's, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Hermeneutical-Theological Response*," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 26 (2015): 118–20.

<sup>7</sup> Feinberg claims that "holding a distinctive future for ethnic Israel is essential to Dispensationalism" ("Continuity and Discontinuity," 81).

<sup>8</sup> David L. Turner, "The Continuity of Scripture and Eschatology: Key Hermeneutical Issues," *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (1985): 286.

must find out how the Bible reveals the fulfillment of prophecy.<sup>9</sup> A logical deductive argument can be made that because of the faithfulness of God, promises made to ethnic and national Israel in the OT about the future must be fulfilled in the future by national and ethnic Israel but did the authors of the NT share this view? Did they approach the promises in that way? Can the deductive claims about how the promises must be fulfilled match the inductive examples of how the NT authors viewed fulfillment?

This study will focus on the way in which John interpreted and applied promises made to Israel or statements made about the future of Israel in the OT, particularly (1) Exod 19:6 in Rev 1:6; 5:1; (2) Zech 4:2 in Rev 1:12, 20; (3) Isa 45:14; 49:23; 60:14 in Rev 3:9; (4) Gen 13:16; 15:5; 32:12 in Rev 7:9; (5) Ezek 37:26–28 in Rev 7:15; 21:3; and (6) Ezek 40–48 in Rev 21:9–22:5.<sup>10</sup> John provides clear examples of how early Christians were reading, interpreting, and applying many OT passages and promises directed originally to ethnic and national Israel.<sup>11</sup> This investigation will seek to demonstrate that John freely and consistently applied these passages to the new community of Jews and Gentiles centered on Jesus.<sup>12</sup> This does not, however, demonstrate that he would not have affirmed a both/and or double fulfillment of the promises as Feinberg suggests.<sup>13</sup> This is possible, but there is no explicit indication of such double fulfillment in the Apocalypse of John, and it is a solution that must be brought in from outside the text in order to make the text match a preexisting system of hermeneutical and theological conclusions. In addition to the passages discussed below, there are good reasons to view the 144,000 (Rev 7:5–8), the inner court of the temple (Rev 11:1), the two witnesses (Rev 11:3–

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<sup>9</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, “Israel in Bible Prophecy,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 3 (1992): 120–55.

<sup>10</sup> Zech 12:10 in Rev 1:7 could be included in this list but John’s expansion of Zech 12:10 with “of the earth” is already evident in Zech 12:12 (ἡ γῆ), 14 (πάσαι αἱ φυλαί), 14:17 (ἐκ πασῶν τῶν φυλῶν τῆς γῆς) and John’s addition of “every eye” is probably not determinative. On this see G. K. Beale and Sean M. McDonough, “Revelation,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1090.

<sup>11</sup> On John’s use of the OT, see G. K. Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (JSNTSup 166; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Jan Fekkes III, *Isaiah and the Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and Their Developments* (JSNTSup 93; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); David Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21.1–22.5* (JSNTSup 238; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003); Jean-Pierre Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16.17–19.10* (European University Studies 23, Theology 367; Frankfurt: Lang, 1989); Külli Tõniste, *The Ending of the Canon: A Canonical and Intertextual Reading of Revelation 21–22* (LNTS 526; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016); Beale and McDonough, “Revelation,” 1081–1161. See also Chart 9 in Mark Wilson, *Charts on the Book of Revelation: Literary, Historical, and Theological Perspectives* (Kregel Charts of the Bible and Theology; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 25–30.

<sup>12</sup> Beale and McDonough argue, “A particular feature of Revelation is the universalization of prophetic fulfillment. Designations or descriptions . . . and promises . . . once associated with Israel are now seen to apply to God’s people from every nation” (“Revelation,” 1085).

<sup>13</sup> Feinberg argues that “because of his understanding of covenant promises, the dispensationalist argues that many OT prophecies of future blessing for Israel not only *can* have double fulfillment (once each for Israel and the church) but *must*” (“Systems of Discontinuity,” 81; emphasis original).

13), and the woman with her children (Rev 12:1–17) as visionary descriptions of God’s people in the present time (both Jew and Gentile) but the argumentation does not need to be repeated here.<sup>14</sup>

### I. EXODUS 19:6 IN REVELATION 1:6; 5:10

Exodus 19:3–6 records the first words spoken by God to the people through Moses after they had escaped Egypt and arrived at Mount Sinai. The verses communicate God’s goal in rescuing the people of Israel.<sup>15</sup>

The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests **מְמַלְכֵת כְּהֹנִיִּים**, βασιλειον

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<sup>14</sup> On the identification of the 144,000 (Rev 7:5–8), see Philip L. Mayo, “*Those Who Call Themselves Jews*”: *The Church and Judaism in the Apocalypse of John* (Princeton Monograph Series 60; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 77–106; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 416–23; Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 215–29; John Sweet, *Revelation* (TPI NT Commentaries; London: SCM, 1979), 150; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 90; Ben Witherington III, *Revelation* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 137–38; Joseph L. Mangina, *Revelation* (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible; Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), 110–11; Craig S. Keener, *Revelation* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 230–33; George B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John the Divine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 94–98; George E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 110–17; M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1989), 128–31; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Revelation* (NT Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 245; contra Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 477–78.

On the temple in Rev 11:2, see Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 557–71; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 273–83; Caird, *Revelation*, 132, 152; Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 64; Alan J. Beagley, *The “Sitz im Leben” of the Apocalypse with Particular Reference to the Role of the Church’s Enemies* (BZNW 50; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987), 61; Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 324–25; Koester, *Revelation and the End*, 104–8; Keener, *Revelation*, 288; Charles H. Talbert, *The Apocalypse: A Reading of the Revelation of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 44; Sweet, *Revelation*, 183–84; Boring, *Revelation*, 143; Mayo, “*Those Who Call Themselves Jews*,” 121–27; contra Ladd, *Commentary*, 152–53; David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16* (WBC 52B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 598.

On the two witnesses as the people of God throughout the entire church age, see Rob Dalrymple, “These Are the Ones . . . (Rev 7),” *Bib* 86 (2005): 397; W. J. Harrington, *Revelation* (SP 16; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 123; Mayo, “*Those Who Call Themselves Jews*,” 127–43; Keener, *Revelation*, 291–92; Koester, *Revelation and the End*, 108; Boring, *Revelation*, 143.

On the woman as a multi-faceted symbol for God’s united people throughout history, the messianic community, see Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 239; Witherington, *Revelation*, 167–68; Mangina, *Revelation*, 149–50; Sweet, *Revelation*, 194–95; Boring, *Revelation*, 152; Mayo, “*Those Who Call Themselves Jews*,” 145–63.

<sup>15</sup> John Arthur Davies notes that, “Coming at the beginning of the Sinai pericope, and in particular as the prelude to the theophany and giving of the law, the declaration of Exodus 19:4–6 has a significant bearing on our understanding of the character of the Sinai covenant” (“A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19:6,” *TynBul* 53 [2002]: 159).

ἱεράτευμα] and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”<sup>16</sup>

God rescued them in order to make them into a kingdom of priests and holy nation, his treasured possession. John alludes to Exod 19:6 in two key places in a way that strongly implies a sense of fulfillment in the present (cf. Rev 20:6).<sup>17</sup>

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests [βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς] to his God and Father. (Rev 1:5b–6a)

Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests [βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς] to our God. (Rev 5:9b–10a)

For John, Christ’s work of salvation (freeing his people from sins and ransoming them by his blood) succeeded in creating a kingdom of priests to serve God and reign on the earth. John presents this kingdom of priests as the present reality for God’s people (both Jew and Gentile) and as the fulfillment of what God originally intended for the Hebrews when he rescued them from Egypt many years before. The fulfillment of God’s plan as expressed in Exod 19:6 comes, not through a renewed ethnic or national Israel, but through the purchase of people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Rev 5:9).<sup>18</sup> The activity of this people (both Jew and Gentile) as a kingdom of priests had already begun and would extend into the final state in the new creation (Rev 1:9; 2:26–27; 5:10b; 7:15; 20:4, 6; 22:5).

## II. ZECHARIAH 4:2 IN REVELATION 1:12, 20

In John’s initial vision, the seven lampstands are directly connected to the seven churches (Rev 1:20). The OT background for this is presumably Zech 4:2, which describes Israel as “a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it.”<sup>19</sup> Beale explains, “In Zech. 4:2–6 the lampstand with its seven lamps is a figurative synecdoche: part of the temple furniture stands for the whole temple, which by extension also represents faithful Israel.”<sup>20</sup> This is not as clear as

<sup>16</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the ESV will be used for the English, BHS for the Masoretic Text, Rahlf’s for the Septuagint, and NA<sup>28</sup> for the Greek NT.

<sup>17</sup> On Rev 1:6; 5:10, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Priester für Gott: Studien zum Herrschafts- und Priestermotiv in der Apokalypse* (NTA NF 7; Münster: Aschendorff, 1972); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Redemption as Liberation: Apoc 1:5f. and 5:9f,” *CBQ* 36 (1974): 220–32; A. Gelston, “The Royal Priesthood,” *EJQ* 31 (1959): 152–63; Grant Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 65.

<sup>18</sup> Exod 19:3–6 is appropriated in a similar way in 1 Pet 2:5–10.

<sup>19</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 86.

<sup>20</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 206. He further highlights that this conclusion is widely reflected in later Jewish interpretation: “*Midr.* Ps. 16.12; *Midr. Rab. Lev.* 32.8; *Midr. Rab. Eccles.* 4.1 § 1; *Sifre Deut.* 10; and *Pesikta Rabbati* 51.4 identify the lampstand of Zech. 4:2–3 with Israelites from all epochs gathered at the end of time. *Midr. Rab. Lev.* 30.2; *Midr. Rab. Num.* 13.8; *Midr. Rab. Songs* 4.7 § 1; *Pesikta de Rab Kahana, Piska* 27.2; *Pesikta Rabbati* 7.7; 8.4 interpret the lampstand of Zech. 4:2 as representing Israel” (*Revelation*, 208).

the last example but it demonstrates that John freely applied an OT figure of national and ethnic Israel to the new communities of Jews and Gentiles described as churches.<sup>21</sup>

### III. ISAIAH 45:14; 49:23; 60:14 IN REVELATION 3:9

Isaiah 45:14; 49:23; 60:14 all develop a motif of the Gentiles bowing down before the feet of God's people Israel in a time of restoration.

The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over to you and be yours; they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down to you [προσκυνήσουσίν σοι]. They will plead with you, saying: "Surely God is in you, and there is no other, no god besides him" (Isa 45:14).

"Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you [προσκυνήσουσίν σοι], and lick the dust of your feet [τῶν ποδῶν σου]. Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who wait for me shall not be put to shame" (Isa 49:23).

The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low to you [אֲלֵי אֶלְיָהוּ], and all who despised you shall bow down [וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ] at your feet [עַל-כַּפּוֹתַי]; they shall call you the City of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel. (Isa 60:14).<sup>22</sup>

John builds on this prophetic expectation in a surprising way in Jesus's message to the Philadelphian Christians in Rev 3:9:<sup>23</sup>

Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down [προσκυνήσουσιν] before your feet [ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου], and they will learn that I have loved you.

It is evident that there was some kind of conflict between the Christian community of Jewish and Gentile believers and the ethnic Jews in Philadelphia and

<sup>21</sup> Connection of overcomers to temple imagery and Jerusalem is also clear in Rev 3:12.

<sup>22</sup> The LXX uses the participle *θεδοιότες* (fearing) in place of the two references in the Hebrew to bowing down.

<sup>23</sup> On John's characterization of ethnic Jews in Rev 2:9; 3:9, see Adela Yarbro Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition in the Book of Revelation," *HTR* 79 (1986): 308–20; Peter Borgen, "Polemical in the Book of Revelation," in *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues in Polemic and Faith* (ed. C. A. Evans and D. A. Hagner; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 199–211; Jan Lambrecht, "'Synagogues of Satan' (Rev 2:9 and 3:9): Anti-Judaism in the Book of Revelation," in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (ed. R. Bieringer et al.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 514–30; Steve Friesen, "Sarcasm in Revelation 2–3: Churches, Christian, True Jews, and Satanic Synagogues," in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (ed. D. L. Barr; SBL Symposium Series 39; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 127–44; Mayo, "Those Who Call Themselves Jews," 51–76; M. Marilou S. Ibita, "Identity Construction in Rev 2,8–11 and 3,7–13: A Normativity of the Future Reading and Its Implications for Jewish-Christian Dialogue," in *New Perspectives on the Book of Revelation* (ed. Adela Yarbro Collins; BETL 291; Leuven, Peeters, 2017), 487–507.

Smyrna (cf. Rev 2:9).<sup>24</sup> We can speculate that ethnic Jews in these cities were denouncing the Christians to the local authorities in such a way to make it clear they should not fall under the label of Judaism. Jesus makes it clear that these ethnic Jews had lost the right to the name because of their rejection of him as evident through their opposition to his people.<sup>25</sup> For John, Jewishness (for both ethnic Jews and Gentiles) is constituted through allegiance to Jesus and not by ethnicity.<sup>26</sup> Jesus through John makes clear that ethnicity is neither a sufficient nor necessary reason to truly possess the title of Jew.

To emphasize the severity of the loss that comes from rejecting him and opposing his people, Jesus took Isaianic prophecies of restoration in which the Gentiles would bow down before the feet of ethnic Israelites and acknowledge God's choice and blessing of them and applied them to the Christians in Philadelphia. Only now the ethnic Jews who rejected Jesus are identified with the Gentile nations, and the Christians (both Jews and Gentiles) take the place of ethnic and national Israel in the restoration. This application of the Isaianic restoration prophecies flows naturally from the first part of Rev 3:9 (and Rev 2:9) in which ethnic Jews who rejected Jesus lost the right to call themselves Jews.<sup>27</sup> For John, "Jewishness" is determined by allegiance to Jesus, the Jewish Messiah.<sup>28</sup>

There is certainly a note of judgment for ethnic Jews who had rejected their Messiah and were opposing God's people in Rev 3:9, but there is also a note of hope. In the Isaiah passages noted above the Gentiles who demonstrated allegiance to Israel's God would share in some way in the restoration. In John's reverse inter-

<sup>24</sup> Mayo, "Those Who Call Themselves Jews," 34; Osborne, *Revelation*, 131.

<sup>25</sup> Beale notes a parallel here to how the Qumran sectarians called apostate Jews "a congregation of Belial" in 1QH 2.22 (*Revelation*, 241).

<sup>26</sup> This conviction was widespread in early Christianity: Rom 2:29; 9:6; 2 Cor 1:20–21; Gal 3:29; 6:16; Eph 2:19; Phil 3:3–8; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 1:1; 2:9. In regard to the Gospel of John, Jan van der Watt and Jacobus Kok argue that, "Although they might think that they are children of Abraham or even children of God, they are not (John 8:37, 39; 41–42), because they have renounced their right to be named children of God by the way they live. Their behaviour towards Jesus disaffirms their identity as children of Abraham" ("Violence in a Gospel of Love," in *Coping with Violence in the New Testament* [ed. G. R. de Villiers and J. W. van Henten; Studies in Theology and Religion 16; Brill: Leiden, 2012], 151–84, 171–72). In regard to Paul, Bert-Jan Liettaert Peerbolte concludes, "The movement of followers of Christ—Jew and Greek alike—is the eschatological Israel with which God has made a new covenant. In his eyes, this particular movement reflects the true, eschatological Israel and is called to that state by God. Paul's mission is based on this idea and for him the new Israel of Jew and Greek together is proof that the prophecies of Isaiah were being fulfilled in his day: the Gentiles were turning toward Zion" ("Morality and Boundaries in Paul," in *Sensitivity to Outsiders: Exploring the Dynamic Relationship between Mission and Ethics in the New Testament and Early Christianity* [ed. Jakobus Kok et al.; WUNT 2/364; Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2014], 222–23).

<sup>27</sup> This must not lead to any form of anti-Judaism which has been a real and terrible reality at various points in church history. John was a Jew and his churches consisted of both Jews and Gentiles. It is simply stating that those who were actively opposing God's kingdom and priests were functioning as agents of Satan and did not constitute Israel in regard to the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to his people. There is no hint that the church should "fight" back in any way, shape, or form.

<sup>28</sup> Mayo concludes, "John now redefines what it means to be a Jew in more theological terms. It is the faithful of God, both Jews and Gentiles, who comprise God's covenant people" ("Those Who Call Themselves Jews," 76).

pretation and application of the passages there would presumably be hope for ethnic Jews who were opposing God's people to change course and regain inclusion within God's people (cf. the natural branches being grafted back into the tree in Rom 11:23: "if they do not continue in their unbelief").<sup>29</sup>

#### IV. GENESIS 13:16; 15:5; 32:12 (13); HOSEA 1:10 (2:1) IN REVELATION 7:9

Revelation 7:9 answers the question which ended John's description of the sixth seal: "For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Rev 6:17). In John's vision, he sees "a great multitude that no one could number (*ὄν ἀριθμῆσαι αὐτὸν οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο*), from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands" (Rev 7:9). The vision of victory in Rev 7:9–17 is not temporally precise and it seems to move from John's present (the ones coming out of the tribulation of which John was likewise a part [cf. Rev 1:9 with Rev 7:14]), through the intermediate state to existence in God's new creation (cf. Rev 7:17 with Rev 21:4, 6). It is a vision of the victory and reward of God's people who are able to stand in the day of God's wrath.

This vision of victory for God's people builds on God's promise to Abraham about having descendants which nobody was able to number but universalizes it to include those from every nation, tribe, people, and language in a manner which suggests fulfillment. The final salvation of all God's people is presented in language which recalls God's promises to Abraham about his seed.<sup>30</sup> Compare *ὄν ἀριθμῆσαι αὐτὸν οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο* in Rev 7:9 with LXX Gen 13:16 (*εἰ δύναται τις ἐξαριθμῆσαι τὴν ἄμμιον τῆς γῆς, καὶ τὸ σπέρμα σου ἐξαριθμηθήσεται*), Gen 15:5 (*ἀριθμησον τοὺς ἀστέρας, εἰ δυνήσῃ ἐξαριθμῆσαι αὐτούς. καὶ εἶπεν Οὕτως ἔσται τὸ σπέρμα σου*), Gen 32:13 (*ἢ οὐκ ἀριθμηθήσεται ἀπὸ τοῦ πλήθους*), and Hos 2:1 (*ἦν ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν υἰῶν Ἰσραὴλ ὡς ἡ ἄμμος τῆς θαλάσσης, ἢ οὐκ ἐκμετρηθήσεται οὐδὲ ἐξαριθμηθήσεται*).<sup>31</sup> Christian believers (both Jew and Gentile) bring consummate fulfillment to God's promises to Abraham about his seed (cf. Gal 3:29).

#### V. EZEKIEL 37:26–28 IN REVELATION 7:15; 21:3

Ezekiel 37:15–28 provides a prophetic promise of unification for Israel and Judah and restoration in the land with David as their king. The powerful vision of ethnic and national restoration culminates with the following words.

I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them and will set my sanctuary [*τὰ ἅγια μου*] in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place [*κατασκήνωσίς*] shall be with them, and I will be their God [*ἔσομαι αὐτοῖς θεός*], and they shall be my people [*αὐτοὶ μου ἔσονται λαός*]. Then the nations will

<sup>29</sup> Beale and McDonough, "Revelation," 1097.

<sup>30</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 171; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 223; Osborne, *Revelation*, 318.

<sup>31</sup> Compare also Gen 16:10 (*καὶ οὐκ ἀριθμηθήσεται ἀπὸ τοῦ πλήθους*); *Jub.* 13:20.

know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary [τὰ ἅγια μου] is in their midst forevermore. (Ezek 37:26–28)

John clearly indicates where and how this prophecy would be fulfilled.<sup>32</sup> The vision of future salvation for the innumerable multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language in Rev 7:9 includes the promise that “he who sits on the throne will shelter [σκηνώσει] them with his presence” (Rev 7:15). This anticipates the fuller promise in Rev 21:3 that in God’s new creation “the dwelling place [σκηνή] of God is with man. He will dwell [σκηνώσει] with them, and they will be his people [αὐτοὶ λαοὶ αὐτοῦ ἔσονται], and God himself will be with them [αὐτὸς ὁ θεὸς μετ’ αὐτῶν ἔσται] as their God.” For John, the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s vision of national and ethnic restoration comes in the salvation of all God’s people (Jew and Gentile) in God’s new creation.<sup>33</sup>

## VI. EZEKIEL 40–48 IN REVELATION 21:9–22:5

John’s vision of new creation, the new heavens and earth in Rev 21:9–22:5, seems to be, in large part, an interpretation and application of Ezekiel’s visions of restoration in chapters 40–48.<sup>34</sup> Many parallels support this connection.

<sup>32</sup> Although I am highlighting Ezek 37:26–28, the fulfillment of this covenant language could be demonstrated from multiple texts: Lev 26:11–12; Jer 7:23; 11:4; 30:22; 31:33; Zech 2:10–11 [LXX Zech 2:14; κατασκηνώσω ἐν μέσῳ σου]; 8:3 [κατασκηνώσω ἐν μέσῳ Ἱερουσαλήμ]. The inclusion of Gentiles into Israel’s restoration which began with the coming of her Messiah is anticipated in the LXX modification of the MT of Zech 2:15 (Eng. Zech 2:11).

<p>“Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD. And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people. And <b>I will dwell</b> [יְהוָה יֹשֵׁב] in your midst, and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you” (Zech 2:10–11).</p>	<p>τέρπου καὶ εὐφραίνου, θύγατερ Σιων, διότι ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἔρχομαι καὶ κατασκηνώσω (I will dwell) ἐν μέσῳ σου, λέγει κύριος. καὶ καταφεύξονται ἔθνη πολλὰ ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ καὶ ἔσονται αὐτῶ ἐἰς λαὸν καὶ κατασκηνώσουσιν (<b>they will dwell</b>) ἐν μέσῳ σου, καὶ ἐπιγνώσῃ ὅτι κύριος παντοκράτωρ ἔξαπέσταλκέν με πρὸς σέ (Zech 2:14–15).</p>
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<sup>33</sup> Beale and McDonough note, “The application of the Ezek. 37:27 prophecy to the church is striking because Ezekiel emphasizes that when this prophecy takes place, the immediate result will be that ‘the nations will recognize that I am the LORD, who sanctifies *Israel*, when my sanctuary is in their midst’ (37:28). Thus, the church appears to be the continuation of Israel” (“Revelation,” 1109; emphasis original).

<sup>34</sup> Other important intertextual connections in Rev 21:9–22:5 outside of Ezekiel link to Genesis 2–3; Isa 52:1; 54:11–12; 60:1–61:10. Külli Tõniste argues, “While asserting the fulfillment of visions such as Isa. 54 and Ezek. 40–48 Revelation affirms consistently with the rest of the NT tradition (and unlike some teaching of the Qumran community) that the physical temple has become obsolete (21.22). In line with some Qumran traditions, the author of Revelation equates his own faith community as the spiritual new Jerusalem” (*The Ending of the Canon*, 152).

Rev 21:9–22:5	Ezekiel 40–48
<p>“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain [ἐπὶ ὄρος μέγα καὶ ὑψηλόν], and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.” (Rev 21:10)</p>	<p>“In visions of God he brought me to the land of Israel, and set me down on a very high mountain [ἐπ’ ὄρους ὑψηλοῦ σφόδρα], on which was a structure like a city to the south.” (Ezek 40:2)</p>
<p>“Having the glory of God [τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ], its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.” (Rev 21:11)</p>	<p>“The glory of the God (δόξα θεοῦ) of Israel was coming from the east. ... and the earth shone with his glory. ... As the glory of the LORD entered the temple by the gate facing east, the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple.” (Ezek 43:2–5)</p>
<p>“It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed [ὀνόματα ἐπιγεγραμμένα, ἃ ἔστιν (τὰ ὀνόματα) τῶν δώδεκα φυλῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραήλ] on the east three gates [ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς πυλῶνες τρεῖς], on the north three gates [ἀπὸ βορρᾶ πυλῶνες τρεῖς], on the south three gates [ἀπὸ νότου πυλῶνες τρεῖς], and on the west three gates [ἀπὸ δυσμῶν πυλῶνες τρεῖς].” (Rev 21:12–13)</p>	<p>“These shall be the exits of the city: On the north side ... three gates [πύλαι τρεῖς πρὸς βορρᾶν], the gate of Reuben, the gate of Judah, and the gate of Levi, the gates of the city being named after the tribes of Israel [καὶ αἱ πύλαι τῆς πόλεως ἐπ’ ὀνόμασιν φυλῶν τοῦ Ἰσραηλ]. On the east side ... three gates [πρὸς ἀνατολὰς ... καὶ πύλαι τρεῖς], the gate of Joseph, the gate of Benjamin, and the gate of Dan. On the south side ... three gates [πρὸς νότον ... καὶ πύλαι τρεῖς], the gate of Simeon, the gate of Issachar, and the gate of Zebulun. On the west side ... three gates [πρὸς θάλασσαν ... καὶ πύλαι τρεῖς], the gate of Gad, the gate of Asher, and the gate of Naphtali.” (Ezek 48:30–34; cf. Ezek 40:5–6; 42:15–20)</p>
<p>“And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod [μέτρον κάλαμον] of gold to measure the city and its gates [πυλῶνας] and walls [τειχος].” (Rev 21:15)</p>	<p>“There was a man whose appearance was like bronze, with a linen cord and a measuring reed [κάλαμος μέτρου] in his hand. ... So he measured the thickness of the wall [τὸ προτείχισμα]. ... Then he went into the gateway facing east ... and measured the threshold of the gate [τῆς πύλης].” (Ezek 40:3, 5–6)</p>

<p>“The city lies foursquare, its length [μήκος] the same as its width [πλάτος]. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal.” (Rev 21:16)</p>	<p>The city (Ezek 48:16–17), temple (Ezek 45:2), and most holy place (Ezek 41:4) would be foursquare. The language of length (μήκος) and width (πλάτος) comes from Ezek 48:8–13.</p>
<p>“He also measured its wall [ἐμέτρησεν τὸ τεῖχος αὐτῆς], 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel’s measurement.” (Rev 21:17)</p>	<p>“Then he measured the wall [διεμέτρησεν τὸν τοῖχον] of the temple.” (Ezek 41:5)          “So he measured the thickness of the wall [διεμέτρησεν τὸ προτείχισμα].” (Ezek 40:5)</p>
<p>“And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb [ἡ γὰρ δόξα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐφώτισεν αὐτήν, καὶ ὁ λύχνος αὐτῆς τὸ ἀρνίον].” (Rev 21:23)</p>	<p>“And the earth shone with his glory [ἡ γῆ ἐξέλαμπεν ὡς φέγγος ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης κυκλόθεν].” (Ezek 43:2; cf. Isa 60:9)</p>
<p>“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing [ποταμὸν ὕδατος ζωῆς λαμπρὸν ὡς κρύσταλλον, ἐκπορευόμενον] from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.” (Rev 22:1–2a)</p>	<p>“And behold, water was issuing [ὔδωρ ἐξεπορεύετο] from below the threshold of the temple toward the east ... so everything will live [ζήσεται] where the river goes.” (Ezek 47:1, 9)</p>
<p>“Also, on either side of the river [τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν], the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month [κατὰ μῆνα ἕκαστον ἀποδίδουν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτοῦ]. The leaves [τὰ φύλλα] of the tree were for the healing [εἰς θεραπείαν] of the nations.” (Rev 22:2)</p>	<p>“And on the banks, on both sides of the river [ἐπὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἀναβήσεται ἐπὶ τοῦ χεῖλους αὐτοῦ ἔνθεν καὶ ἔνθεν], there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month [ἰψῆτη; missing in LXX], because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves [ἀνάβασις αὐτῶν; ἰηζυ] for healing [εἰς ὑγίειαν].” (Ezek 47:12)</p>

The main differences between the two visionary accounts result from the lack of a temple in John’s vision of God’s new creation: “And I saw no temple in the

city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Rev 21:22).<sup>35</sup> John thus does not develop many of the temple details of Ezekiel because for him they are fulfilled in the divine presence with his people.<sup>36</sup> This leads to a combination of details from Ezekiel’s temple and city in John’s vision of the eschatological city.<sup>37</sup> This blending of temple and city is also evident in the way that John adds height to Ezekiel’s length and width; the city thus became a cube in imitation of the inner sanctuary of the temple (1 Kgs 6:20).

These parallels strongly suggest that when John read Ezekiel 40–48 he was not uncertain about when and how the vision would be fulfilled; he clearly understood it as referring to the final state of salvation for all of God’s people (Jew and Gentile) in God’s new creation.<sup>38</sup> He did not connect its fulfillment to the millennial kingdom or a period of time before Jesus’s parousia in any literal fashion. Ezekiel’s original vision focused on the ethnic and national restoration of Israel, but this is expanded in John’s interpreting vision to include the salvation of all God’s people in God’s new creation. This expansion is evident by John’s connection of the foundations of the walls with the apostles (21:14; cf. Eph 2:20) and his connection of the city as a whole with the bride, the wife of the lamb (Rev 21:9).<sup>39</sup> The Lamb’s bride consisted of all of those purchased by his blood and made into a kingdom of priests (Rev 1:5–6; 5:10), the innumerable multitude standing before the throne (Rev 7:9).<sup>40</sup>

## VII. CONCLUSION

This study has sought to demonstrate that John did not interpret the OT promises to Israel as if they had to be fulfilled by ethnic national Israel in the present or the future. He freely applied such promises to the community of God’s people in his time which was made up of both Jew and Gentile or to the new crea-

<sup>35</sup> Töniste, building on the work of Kalinda Rose Stevenson (*The Vision of Transformation: The Territorial Rhetoric of Ezekiel 40–48* [SBLDS 154; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996]), argues that “there is no radical departure from Ezekiel if we understand that both are merely using architectural rhetoric to communicate a new pattern of relationships with God and between humans using temple as a model” (*Ending of the Canon*, 172).

<sup>36</sup> One could argue that John rightly focuses on the main point of Ezekiel 40–48 as expressed in Ezek 48:35—God’s presence with his people (“The Lord is there”; Ezek 48:35; cf. Töniste, *Ending of the Canon*, 151).

<sup>37</sup> Beale and McDonough note, “Revelation 21:12–22:5 further interprets the yet future fulfillment of Ezekiel by collapsing temple, city, and land into one end-time picture portraying the one reality of God’s communion with his people” (“Revelation,” 1087).

<sup>38</sup> Mayo, “*Those Who Call Themselves Jews*,” 177–78.

<sup>39</sup> Töniste traces this theme through the NT and argues, “In continuity with the rest of the NT witnesses, John sees the eschatological Jerusalem as consisting of Israel and church fitted together: God has built the church into a living household/temple filled with Christ” (*Ending of the Canon*, 163, cf. 168).

<sup>40</sup> Mayo traces these connections: “The saints are those sealed from the twelve tribes of Israel (7.1–8), yet also the innumerable multitude from every nation (7.9). They are the temple (11.1–2) and the two witnesses (reminiscent of Moses and Elijah), who suffer the same fate as ‘their Lord’ (11.3–13). They are also the heavenly woman, who is at once the mother of the Messiah but also of the saints (12.1–17), and they are the bride of the Lamb, the new Jerusalem (21.1–22.5)” (*Those Who Call Themselves Jews*, 25).

tion.<sup>41</sup> When John's interpretations of OT promises to ethnic and national Israel are carefully studied, it becomes evident that John did not hold to the hermeneutical maxim that God's promises to ethnic and national Israel had to be fulfilled by ethnic and national Israel. God's promises to ethnic and national Israel were fulfilled by the community of both Jews and Gentiles brought into existence by the sacrificial death and resurrection of Israel's Messiah. In the Apocalypse of John, there is no sense that the church (as some Gentile association or organization distinct from God's people) had replaced Israel but that God's renewed people, centered on her Messiah, welcomed Gentiles into Israel's restoration which had begun and would culminate after a period of tribulation in eternal life in God's new creation.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> This is not unique to John, and other early Christians regularly and easily applied passages of restoration which would have originally focused on national and ethnic Israel to the salvation that was being proclaimed in the present time to both Jews and Gentiles (cf. Rom. 9:24–26; 10:12–13; 2 Cor. 5:17; 6:2, 16–18). Mayo concludes that “John interprets Jewish symbols and prophetic tradition in light of the Christ-event and freely applies these symbols and tradition to the universal people of God, the church” (“*Those Who Call Themselves Jews*,” 204).

<sup>42</sup> John Christopher Thomas and Frank D. Macchia rightly argue that “it is not the church that fulfills Israel but Christ, and both Israel and the church find their destiny in him” (*Revelation* [Two Horizons NT Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016], 534). See the entirety of Macchia's excellent discussion of “Israel and the Nations” on pages 532–36. Likewise, Mayo argue that, “for John, the church is subsumed in, and the full extension of, God's covenant people Israel. The church is God's Israel in that it represents God's covenant people, both Jews and Gentiles, who are heirs of the covenant promises first given to Israel and realized in the redemptive work of the Lamb” (“*Those Who Call Themselves Jews*,” 25).