AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CITY MOTIF IN REVELATION 17-18 AND 21-22

A Dissertation Submitted to Glasgow University

In Fulfilment of the Requirements of the Degree

Master of Theology

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August 2021

Acknowledgments

On completion of this project it is only right to acknowledge the encouragement I have received along the way. To my family at Cumbernauld Free church, OMF UK, and the Free church board of ministry, I am grateful for your support which enabled me to undertake this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Alistair I. Wilson for his guidance and supervision of this research as well as his fellowship in seeing Jesus known more throughout the world. To Dr. Charles E. White, I am grateful to the Lord for your continued prayers for me to see the city land.

I could not have completed this research in the midst of all challenges of the pandemic without the love, care, encouragement and patience of my wife Jennifer. I am grateful to God for your companionship and love on the journey to know Jesus more. It inspires me to see the way you raise our children, Sophia, Joshua and Luke. We move forward towards the day where, by his grace, we will see our king face to face (Rev 22:4-5).

Finally, I give thanks to my gracious Father in heaven for allowing me this season of study. My desire is that throughout the world more people would join in the song of eternity; "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev 7:10).

Soli Deo Gloria

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Urban centres throughout the world are expanding rapidly. According to UN figures in 2018 "55 per cent of the world's population resided in urban areas" with projections suggesting that by 2050 this will rise to 68 per cent of the world population.[1] Such evidence suggests that as the 21st century unfolds engagement with the city will likely increase and therefore impact many aspects of human life globally. It is not only this socio-economic reality which raises questions about the role and purpose of the city. As Christians seek to follow Jesus in an increasingly urbanised world what does Scripture have to say? Both the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) feature discussions of the urban world, inviting a question: what is the purpose of the city? Put another way, to what extent in Scripture is the city an inherently evil place or part of God's design for humanity?

A question like this is sometimes posed by ministry practitioners seeking to form biblical answers to the aforementioned need. Harvie Conn & Manuel Ortiz are a good example of this type of engagement. Recognising the trend in global urbanization they seek to understand the role of the church in a world of cities.[2] This question also comes from a desire to correct the often negative impression of the city in the Christian church.[3] Since Scripture speaks about cities frequently, something which ministry practitioners have observed, it seems appropriate to explore this theme in the field of biblical studies. Though there are various multi-disciplinary works which handle the Christian response to the city there are few exegetically driven studies.[4] The present research seeks to address this gap.

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[1] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). *World Urbanization Prospects 2018: Highlights* (ST/ESA/SER.A /421), 5.
[2] Harvie M. Conn & Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City and the People of God*, (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 29.
[3] Stephen T. Um & Justin Buzzard, *Why Cities Matter: To God, the Culture and the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 16.
[4] T.D. Alexander, *The City of God and the Goal of Creation*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018). This is a welcome addition to this discussion but by definition it is a short study.

Defining the city

Before going any further it is important to define what is meant by a "city". Both biblical Hebrew and Greek make reference to the city in numerous settings. It is not within the scope of this study to delve into the intricacies of the etymological roots of עִיר[5] *or* πόλις[6]; this can be done by consulting either Held[7] or the more recent work of Johnson.[8] Both studies note the positive tone of city terminology. Held argues that cities are seen as a place of security and community in the OT which develop into a centre of political and religious power in the NT. Johnson comes to similar conclusions but develops them further noting that cities in the OT, although places of security and community, "they also served as places of religious devotion and power".[9] Johnson's argument adds further nuance noting the religious aspect of cities in the OT as well as the NT and as such is to be preferred.

Rather than seeing the city as a sociological development of humanity, we see something of God's intention for his creation.[10] These observations help to shape a proposed theological working definition for the city as follows:

> The city is a divinely designed worship centre, initiated by God and developed by humanity. It is a physical site where image bearing individuals come together in vast numbers seeking security, prosperity and community, producing creativity. This creativity in turn yields a culture which either glorifies or rejects God.

[5] James D. Price, 'עִיר' in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis: Volume 3*, edited by Willem A. VanGemeren, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 396-399.
[6] BDAG, 685-686.
[7] Jay Allen Held, "Foundations of a Biblical Theology of the City" (MTh diss., Western Seminary, 2005), 36-68.
[8] Wendal Mark Johnson, "Reaching the Secular City: A Practical Model for Brazilian Urban Missionaries Through the Lens of Lesslie Newbigin" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 30-36.
[9] Johnson, Secular, 32.
[10] Alexander, *City*, 15. See also, David W. Smith, *Seeking a City with Foundations: Theology for an Urban World* (Nottingham: IVP, 2011), 17-26.

Given the many developments of the city throughout history,[11] especially during the second-temple period,[12] any definition will be lacking. This definition is helpful for two reasons. First, it seeks to avoid superimposing an understanding of contemporary cities or their forms of urban living onto the biblical text. Secondly, it recognises that the city is not primarily a sociological phenomenon driven by human advancement as Wilson would argue.[13] Instead, it recognises that God has intentions for human life which cohere in the formation of cities. And it is this point which will be referred to throughout this thesis in order to determine to what extent the city is inherently evil or central to divine design.

Methodology

It is my aim to answer this question by tracing the city motif throughout scripture with specific exegetical focus on the book of Revelation. As a professing Christian in the Reformed tradition I assume the canonicity of Scripture set out in the Westminster confession.[14] This assumption means I recognise a unity spanning the Bible making it possible to trace specific themes across Scripture,[15] so I will develop a biblical-theological framework to show the development of the city motif and its relationship to the texts of Revelation. Biblical Theology can be criticised for lacking, "generally accepted principles, method or structure."[16] However, when recognised as "the ordered study of the understanding of the revelation of God contained in the canonical scriptures of the Old and New

[11] Ben Wilson, *Metropolis: A History of Humankinds Greatest Invention*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2020); Conn & Ortiz, *Urban*, 33-79.
[12] D.F. Watson, 'Cities, Greco-Roman' in Craig A. Evans & Stanley E. Porter (Eds.), *DONTB*, (Nottingham: IVP, 2000), 212-214.
[13] Wilson, *Metropolis*, 1; 387.
[14] WCF, 1:2.
[15] Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).
[16] J.L. McKenzie, *A Theology of the Old Testament*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), p.15.

Testaments"[17] and a way to "uncover and articulate the unity of *all* the biblical texts taken together, resorting primarily to the categories of those texts themselves"[18] it offers a helpful framework for this type of exegetical work.

Two reasons highlight the usefulness of Biblical Theology for this project. First, this methodology balances breadth and specificity meaning the book of Revelation retains its particular contribution while being read within the wider context of Scripture.[19] Affirming the value of individual texts and the canon as God's self-revelation to humanity is significant. These are not competing texts. Rather, they exist in a synergetic relationship along a progressive historical line.[20] As Klink and Lockett argue "rather than a string of unrelated events, redemptive history is the unified and progressive (historical) account of God's saving purposes in and for the world."[21] Adopting a methodology which embraces these two elements is beneficial for assessing the city motif and drawing conclusions about the purpose of the city.

Secondly, this work seeks to engage the city motif in a way which unites the academy and faith community. As Scobie notes, "the Bible is most truly interpreted in relation to its canonical intention…read as the Word of God by the people of God."[22] It could be argued that balancing dogma and exegesis is a precarious task since the credibility of one will have to be sacrificed for the other. It is my view that the church and the academy need not be positioned against each other. Supposed factions can, and should, work in tandem to inform

[17] Charles H. H. Scobie, 'The Challenge of Biblical Theology', *Tyndale bulletin*, (42.1) (1992), 47. See also, Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The shorter writings of Geerhardus Vos,* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), 19.
[18] D. A. Carson, 'Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology' in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, edited by T.D. Alexander & Brian. S. Rosner, (Leicester: IVP, 2000), 100.
[19] B.S. Rosner, 'Biblical Theology', in *NDBT,* 3.
[20] Karl Möller, 'The Nature and Genre of Biblical Theology' in Craig Bartholomew, Mary Healey, Karl Möller & Robin Parry (Eds.), *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 44-47.
[21] Edward W. Klink III & Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: a Comparison of Theory and Practice*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 66.
[22] Scobie, 'Biblical Theology', 47.

one another, leading to greater insight and real world application. A biblical-theological methodology allows this to happen.

Why Revelation?

Having established a methodological framework it is now possible to answer the question of exegetical focus. When considering the role of the city in salvation history, why concentrate on the book of Revelation? Although Revelation has often been controversially received[23] and its interpretation in certain communities often caught between "dispensational distraction or scholarly abstraction"[24] there are two factors which have shaped my decision. First, the location of Revelation is influential. As the final book in the canon of Scripture[25] it offers a unique perspective. Bauckham suggests that John was aware he was writing "the climax of prophetic revelation" with particular relation to the OT.[26] Tabb develops this proposal in recognition of Revelation's role as the climax of the scriptural narrative, not only canonical prophecy.[27] I agree with Tabb's expansion as it illuminates the unique position of the book in the framework of the canon. As such it suggests that there is fertile ground for exegetical study of the city in the purposes of God.

The second factor is the prevalence of the city motif in the book of Revelation. Either by directly naming (Rev 1:11; 2:1-3:22) or applying a moniker (Rev 11:8; 16:19; 17:1-18:24; 21:1-22:5) John saturates the book with reference to the urban world. While it would be interesting to consider the cities in Rev 2:1-3:22, the exegetical work will focus on the juxtaposition of Babylon and new Jerusalem. As the climax of the canon, it makes sense that

[23] For a brief overview see Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation*, (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), 14-15.
[24] Douglas D. Webster, *Follow the Lamb: A Pastoral Approach to Revelation*, (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 11.
[25] Based on English NT traditions and the outline of canon in the WCF.
[26] Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation*, (London: T&T Clark, 1993), x.
[27] Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, (Downers Grove: IVP, 2019), 24.

what is said here about the role of the city in the purposes of God will have multiple avenues of exploration which will help in answering the question I have originally posed; is the city inherently evil or is it part of God's design for humanity?

Apocalyptic literature

Before proceeding it would be unwise to bypass the question of genre in pursuit of any answers about the role of the city. It is commonly understood that Revelation is a combination of three literary genres; apocalyptic (Rev 1:1), prophecy (Rev 1:3) and epistle (Rev 1:11).[28] For the purpose of this research it is important to hone in on the apocalyptic nature of this book. My reason for this is found in the language and imagery of Babylon (Rev 17:1-18:24) and new Jerusalem (Rev 21:1-22:5). Each of these cities is portrayed via a multiplicity of images which require nuanced discussion. Although not detailed, an awareness of how apocalyptic literature functions will be helpful.

Unsurprisingly, not everyone agrees with Revelation's designation as apocalyptic literature. For example, Beale does not regard the opening word of Rev 1:1 (ἀποκάλυψις) as indicative of genre[29] but Smalley does.[30] Whether the opening word is indicative of genre or not, the book as a whole fits the apocalyptic category. Collins defines apocalyptic literature as "a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world."[31]

[28] G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 37-43.
[29] Beale, *Revelation*, 181.
[30] Stephen S. Smalley, *Thunder and Love: John's Revelation and John's Community* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1994), 24.
[31] John J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre", *Semeia* 14 (1979), 9.

Apocalyptic works, such as Revelation, are therefore largely concerned with transcendent reality. This suggests "it is the interpreters primary responsibility not so much to decode the vision by identifying the concrete referent of a revealed image, but to recalibrate one's perceptions of their lived experience in light of the revelation received."[32] In other words the symbolic world of the text "may on occasion achieve its effect precisely through the element of uncertainty."[33] While I agree with these statements does it mean that there is nothing to be deduced about physical reality, either in the 1st century or the age to come? An aspect of this research will be to determine the extent to which the city motif in Rev 17:1-18:24 and Rev 21:1-22:5 can be understood as a signpost of God's intention of the city in the present and the future.

It is my intention to argue that the city be seen as part of God's design for humanity and a central aspect of the age to come. What has been experienced in the parodies of Babylon throughout human history will be experienced in perfect reality at the consummation of God's kingdom in the new Jerusalem. I will argue that God's good design for the city can be traced across scripture and that an intertextual reading of Revelation in the context of the canon aids in coming to this conclusion.

[32] Ben C. Blackwell, John K. Goodrich, Jason Maston & Mark Matthews "Introduction" in Ben C. Blackwell, John K. Goodrich & Jason Maston, *"Reading Revelation in Context: John's Apocalypse and Second Temple Judaism*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 22.
[33] John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature 3rd Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 20.

Chapter 2: Literature review

As noted in the previous chapter there are many contributions to the discussion of a Christian perspective on the city. Most of these works fall into one of three categories; philosophical theology, textual exegesis or missiology. What follows is an assessment of work in each of these categories which will highlight the need for biblical theological engagement with the city motif in the book of Revelation.

Philosophical theology

To begin, Jacques Ellul's cross-disciplinary work *The Meaning of the City* is an important contribution to this discussion. Ellul combines both philosophical and theological reflection to produce a sharp critique of the urban world presented in the Bible. His methodological approach embraces a mythical hermeneutic which he defines as follows: "the addition of theological significance to a fact which in itself… has no such obvious significance. Its role is therefore to make a fact 'meaningful', to show it up as bearing the revelation of God."[34] In holding fact and theologised fact in tension, Ellul does not provide a suitable framework on which to construct theological reflection on the urban world. It does not deal with the text on its own terms, rather it seeks to find the theologised meaning of a passage which can lead to subjective analysis.

This is seen in Ellul's negative reading of the city stating that "the city is humanity's alternative to trusting the Lord."[35] To develop this claim, he takes the reader to the first city in the Bible (Gen 4:17-24) and argues that "The entire history of the city has its beginning in Cain's act. All the builders were sons of Cain and act with the same purpose."[36] We must ask, is the city a purely human phenomenon as Ellul suggests? Or is it something more than a

[34] Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 18.
[35] Ellul, *City*, 1.
[36] Ellul, *City*, 10.

human invention in God's creation? By starting his assessment of the city with the Cain narrative, and relying on a mythological hermeneutic, Ellul argues that the establishment of the urban world is fundamentally a sociological development. However, I will argue that the context of Gen 1-2 and subsequent texts (Ex 21:12-14; Num 35:9-15; 2 Sam 5:6-12; Jer 29:4-7) suggest a more positive and theocentric perspective. Although I disagree with Ellul's critical and anthropocentric reading of the city, his willingness to engage with the problems of the city in a fallen world are important to discuss.

Textual Exegesis

With the intention of developing a biblical theology of the city in the book of Revelation exegetical works will form the core of the literature discussed throughout. Richard Bauckham has written two seminal monographs on Revelation.[37] His work centres on how one should read and interpret the book in light of John's awareness of writing the climax of biblical prophecy.[38] Bauckham shows that John was not haphazard in his use of scripture, but followed "a pattern of disciplined and deliberate *allusion* to specific Old Testament texts."[39] G.K. Beale also identifies John's use of the OT by allusion as an essential component for developing a hermeneutical framework which allows the text of Revelation to speak on its own terms.[40]

Lindars, however, disagrees. He states that "The place of the Old Testament in the formation of New Testament theology is that of a servant, ready to run to the aid of the gospel whenever it is required, bolstering up arguments, and filling out meaning through

[37] Bauckham, *Climax*; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
[38] Bauckham, *Climax*, xi.
[39] Bauckham, *Climax*, xi. (Emphasis original).
[40] Beale, *Revelation*, 76-99.

evocative allusions, but never acting as the master or leading the way".[41] Although it is difficult to disentangle John's use of the OT and antecedent traditions[42] it is equally difficult to substantiate Lindars proposal in relation to Revelation. I find Bauckham and Beale's assessment more convincing since they seek to uphold the coherent relationship that exists between Revelation and the canon.

Recently Bauckham's thesis has been developed by Brian Tabb to show that Revelation is not only the climax of prophecy but the capstone of Christian Scripture.[43] Fanning broadly supports Tabb's perspective recognising the importance of the canonical location of Revelation to its interpretation.[44] By employing a biblical theological framework Tabb gives prominence to the eschatological and teleological nature of history in Scripture. This shows how Revelation "brings the scriptural narrative concerning God, his people and his world to its grand conclusion in the already-not-yet reign of Christ and the glorious new creation."[45] Tabb's work will be helpful to this research as he directly addresses both of the main passages considered in the body of the research (Rev 17:1-18:24; 21:1-22:5). Since Tabb's work takes a wider-angle approach, I will focus specifically on Rev 17:1-18:24 and Rev 21:1-22:5, to show how John employs the city motif and the relationship of these texts with the wider canon.

Due to the constraints of this work, I will not engage in detailed dialogue with the hermeneutical positions which exist concerning the interpretation of Revelation.[46] I have chosen to proceed with Beale's proposed fifth way of "Eclecticism".[47] Beale's position

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[41] Barnabas Lindars, "The Place of the Old Testament in the Formation of New Testament Theology: Prolegomena." *New Testament Studies* 23, no. 1 (1976): 59-66.
[42] Garrick V. Allen, *The Book of Revelation and Early Jewish Textual Culture,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 3.
[43] Tabb, *All Things*.
[44] Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation* (ZECNT), (Grand Rapids,: Zondervan, 2020), 24.
[45] Tabb, *All Things*, 24.
[46] For this sort of discussion see Beale, *Revelation*, 44-49; Fanning, *Revelation*, 37-40; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation: Revised,* New International Commentary of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 24-30.; Ian Paul, *Revelation*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, (London: IVP, 2018), 48-51.
[47] Beale, *Revelation*, 48-49.

advocates that "no specific prophesied historical events are discerned in the book, except for the final coming of Christ to deliver and judge and to establish the final form of the kingdom in a consummated new creation."[48] By taking this stance, Beale seeks to hold in tension the symbolism of the book which is applicable across the generations while also acknowledging the coming historical consummation of God's kingdom.[49] This inaugurated eschatology helps the reader recognise the transtemporal nature of the symbolism found throughout the book, but also points to a clear conclusion. Bauckham warns that it would be "a serious mistake to understand the images of Revelation as timeless symbols"[50] and this is a welcome note of caution. However, as Paul argues, "we need to attend carefully to what the text actually says; understand what the writer and first audience might have thought it meant in their own context; and from that discern what God through his Spirit might be saying to us in the situations and challenges that we face."[51] With that in mind, Beale's eclecticism provides a suitable framework on which a biblical theological analysis of the city may be developed from the text and then applied to the scenarios which face the church in the present.

We turn now to consideration of finer details concerning the city as portrayed in the Apocalypse. A critical question arising from Revelation 17:1-18:24 and 21:1-22:5 is how we are to understand the cities of Babylon and new Jerusalem. To what extent are these cities historical or typological? Is new Jerusalem a literal city, a symbolic representation of the people of God in his presence or a mixture of both? The question of how to understand Babylon has a clearer answer. Most commentators are in agreement that Babylon acts as a cypher for the city of Rome which is appropriated by John to critique the imperial regime.[52] Other interpretative options exist, suggesting that Babylon is either the ancient city of

[48] Beale, *Revelation*, 48.
[49] Beale, *Revelation*, 48-49.
[50] Bauckham, *Theology*, 19.
[51] Paul, *Revelation*, 51.
[52] David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, Word Biblical Commentary, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 959-961; Bauckham, Climax, 338-383; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT), (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 608-609.

Mesopotamia or an apostate Jerusalem.[53] However, as Biguzzi concludes in his study, "the traditional interpretation of Babylon as Rome explains, as no other is able to do, both the details of Rev and its narrative plot."[54] Like Bauckham, Biguzzi would caution against interpreting Babylon as represented in every human epoch.[55] However, as before, Beale argues that Babylon should be recognised as a transtemporal symbol of "ungodly economic-religious institutions and facets of culture."[56] With a variety of nuance, others share Beale's position.[57] In the exegetical section of this work, I will argue that the identity of Babylon is rooted historically in a canonical understanding of the city in Mesopotamia, adapted by John to critique the Roman world of his day, with the eschatological and teleological purpose of warning the church about the dangers of being united to the notorious prostitute the "citadel of pagan opposition to the cause of Christ."[58]

Far more challenging is the task of establishing whether the new Jerusalem is a symbolic reference to God's people in his presence or a literal city with physical properties. Aune[59], Hendricksen[60], Mounce[61] and Paul[62] argue that the new Jerusalem is to be viewed metaphorically as the redeemed people of God. Beale more tentatively suggests that the city is a symbol pointing towards the eschatological union between God and his people.[63] Fanning differs from these perspectives suggesting that the new Jerusalem will act as the physical focal point of "lively, productive human life and commerce on a renewed earth."[64] Tabb

[53] See Fanning, *Revelation,* 440-441.
[54] G. Biguzzi, "Is the Babylon of Revelation Rome or Jerusalem?", *Biblica 87:3* (2006), 386.
[55] Biguzzi, *Babylon*, 372.
[56] Beale, *Revelation*, 859.
[57] Fanning, *Revelation*, 440-441; Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 96-101; Robert H. Mounce, *Revelation* (NICNT), (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 306-344; Tabb, *All Things New*, 164.
[58] Mounce, *Revelation,* 306.
[59] Aune, *Revelation*, 1187.
[60] William Hendricksen, *More than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation,* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 199.
[61] Mounce, *Revelation,* 382.
[62] Paul, *Revelation*, 340-341.
[63] Beale, *Revelation*, 1045.
[64] Fanning, *Revelation*, 530-531.

agrees that there is a physical dimension to the new Jerusalem, advocating that it is people and place combined.[65] Bauckham's work unites these various positions. He outlines three OT threads in the texts; place, people and presence of God.[66] Each of these permeate Rev 21:1-22:5 and it is my intention to utilise and expand Bauckham's thread of people, presence and place to demonstrate that new Jerusalem is a physical city.

Theological & Missiological

Finally, as mentioned in the introduction, many of the works which seek to address this theme come from a practitioner's perspective. Although cities in the OT and NT are not directly comparable to the makeup of cities in either the 20th or 21st centuries, there remains legitimate ground to seek instruction from Scripture about how the church should understand the urban world. Most of these practitioner works are cross-disciplinary, engaging in exegetical, theological and missiological analysis.

Of particular importance are works which have developed a biblical theology of the city such as Robert Linthicum's book *City of God, City of Satan*.[67] Linthicum seeks to produce a biblical theology with a missiological thrust. His view of the city is positive and perhaps overly so. However he offers an alternative to the Christian church as to how one may read and understand the urban contours and context of Scripture.[68] More recently T.D. Alexander has contributed a short biblical theology of the city[69] which flowed out of his earlier work on the garden of Eden and the new Jerusalem.[70] Alexander traces the theme of city across the canon claiming that "At the very heart of God's plan for our world stands an

[65] Tabb, *All Things New*, 184.
[66] Bauckham, *Theology*, 126-143.
[67] Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991).
[68] Linthicum, *City of God*, 249/6865 Kindle.
[69] Alexander, *City*, 15-22.
[70] T. Desmond. Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, (Nottingham: IVP, 2008).

extraordinary city… New Jerusalem brings to completion what God intended when he first created earth."[71] This claim sheds important light on how the urban world should be interpreted in Scripture. It is my intention to defend Alexander's claim from the canon by overviewing relevant OT and NT passages in the following chapter. Doing so will highlight the limitations of Ellul's position, leading to a climactic synthesis of the urban threads across Scripture in the book of Revelation.

A number of ministry practitioners have produced important works handling biblical texts and their contemporary application for an increasingly urbanized world. For example, Harvie Conn and Manuel Ortiz explore the biblical foundations for theological reflection and practical engagement in the city.[72] One of the shortcomings of this otherwise excellent work is a lack of engagement with the text of Revelation. This research project will address that lack. Timothy Keller's brief 2002 article *A Biblical Theology of the City* is an influential popular treatment of the subject.[73] He argues that the city is God's design and the fulfilment of the Eden narrative in Genesis. I will argue along similar lines. However, the scope of this research will allow for more detailed discussion and engagement than Keller's short article allowed.[74]

Others have sought to develop theological reflection on the urban world such as Held, who looks at the historical and etymological roots of the city in Scripture and Christian thought.[75] Although he hints at the importance of teleology in understanding the city, Held does not engage with the book of Revelation in a significant way which is an oversight this research seeks to address. Keller's work has led to the popular level publication of Um &

[71] Alexander, *City,* 15.
[72] Conn & Ortiz, *Urban*, 13-29.
[73] Timothy Keller, 'A Biblical Theology of the City', *Evangelicals Now*, July 2002.
[74] Timothy Keller, *Centre Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centred Ministry in Your City,* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 135-151. This is an expansion of Keller's thought, however it too is a brief engagement.
[75] Held, "Foundations".

Buzzard[76] who argue, contra Ellul, that "City building is not an accidental sociological development. City building is God's idea, invention, and intention."[77] This is also the perspective of Wendal Johnson whose recent PhD thesis draws heavily on themes found in the work of Conn, Ortiz and Keller.[78]

However, not all practitioners hold a positive perspective on the city. Goldsmith argues that the biblical narrative is ambivalent to the city, suggesting that an idealised ruralism shaped the longing of the OT people of God.[79] Is there a rural idealism which permeates the biblical narrative? Also, is scripture ambivalent towards the city? I will argue that scripture contains a positive view of the city and will demonstrate that agricultural imagery need not be seen as antithetical to the urban world. Since God's eschatological purposes are to bring all things into unity under Christ (Col 1:20) that must also include a synthesis of the rural and the urban, the garden and the city.

Finally, theological engagement with contemporary issues will be important in producing practical application from exegetical observation. The multidisciplinary work of David Smith assists in developing hermeneutically sensitive conclusions which have relevance for the church and academy.[80] One of Smith's concerns, which I share, is that "theologians have been strangely indifferent to the issues and challenges posed by the growth of an urban world."[81] Another scholar who shares this concern is Scott Sunquist whose academic and cross-cultural experience offers insight into "the interrelated web of urban

[76] Um & Buzzard, *Cities*, 13.
[77] Um & Buzzard, *Cities*, 62.
[78] Johnson, "Secular", 29-46.
[79] Martin Goldsmith, *Get a Grip on Mission: The Challenge of a Changing world* (Leicester: IVP, 2006), 98.
[80] Smith, *Foundations*. David W. Smith, *Liberating the Gospel: Translating the Message of Jesus in a Globalised World* (London: DLT, 2016).
[81] Smith, *Foundations*, 24.

needs"[82] such as "racial reconciliation" and recognition of "the church as the first and last hope for the city".[83]

As John does in the Apocalypse, so too contemporary biblical theological scholars must address the predicament of globalised urbanism. This research is limited so I will relate relevant texts in Revelation to the areas of ethnicity and ecology. Bauckham has addressed the biblical response to global ecological challenges.[84] So too have Paul Williamson[85] and Jonathan Moo.[86] Each of these essays will be helpful in addressing what is meant by "new creation" and therefore the role of the city in the eschatological age.

[82] Scott Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 364.
[83] Sunquist, *Mission*, 366.
[84] Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (London: DLT, 2010), 141-178.
[85] Paul Williamson, 'Deconstruction or Transformation? Earth's Future in Biblical Perspective' in Jonathan Moo & Robin Routledge eds., *As Long As the Earth Endures: The Bible, Creation and the Environment* (Nottingham: IVP, 2014), 125-145.
[86] Jonathan Moo, 'New Testament Hope and a Christian Environmental Ethos', Moo & Routledge, *Earth*, 146-168.

Chapter 3: Old Testament Foundations and Developments of the City

Cities feature prominently in scripture inhabiting a sliding scale between positive and negative.[87] This central tension can be seen in various biblical texts, culminating in the destruction of one city and the establishment of another in Revelation (Rev 17:1-18:24; 21:1-22:5). As noted above Ellul argues that cities are the former, rebelling against God with a divine curse placed on them.[88] He states that "The city is cursed…condemned to death because of everything she represents."[89] My question is this; can the Bible support such a statement? The initial texts discussing the city in the OT seem to point in this direction (Gen 4:17-24; 11:1-9; 19:1-29). However, Linthicum offers another perspective noting that "the world of Moses, David, Daniel and Jesus was an urban world… probably more urban than any civilisation before it or any after it for the next fifteen hundred years."[90] Linthicum may stretch this point but his comment is helpful to this discussion.

In both instances, it is wise to assess this spectrum of opinion in light of the biblical texts on their own merit. To do this I will assess them in their canonical context with the help of exegetical commentators. I will begin by reviewing the Cain narrative (Gen 4:17-24), the development of Babel (Gen 11:1-9) and then the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (19:1-29). Having done this I will shift focus to address the narrative from another, more positive perspective on the city since there are texts across the OT which seem to contradict Ellul's claim (Gen 1-2; Ex 21: 12-14; Num 35:9-35; Deut 19:1-13; Josh 20; 2 Sam 5:6-12; Ps 48; 87; Isa 62:1-2; 66:7-14; Jer 29:4-7). At the conclusion of this chapter I will briefly chart developments in city structure during the intertestamental period since there are significant changes from the ANE to the Greco-Roman city. I will not discuss the city in the NT since

[87] Sunquist, *Mission*, 341.
[88] Ellul, *City*, 44.
[89] Ellul, *City*, 45.
[90] Linthicum, *City of God*, 171/6865, Kindle.

this will be touched on in the subsequent chapters of exegetical work on the texts in Revelation.

Origins

To begin we turn to Genesis 4 where humanity's decline is highlighted by Cain's murder of Abel (Gen 4:8). In a similar way to the rebellion of the garden God intervenes, sets boundaries and sentences Cain to a life of wandering in a land of restlessness (4:10-16).[91] However, the narrative takes an unexpected turn. Instead of Cain adopting a nomadic lifestyle, as it seems he should, we are taken to a construction site (Gen 4:17). What are we to make of the first city? An initial reading of the passage seems to support Ellul's negative assessment since Cain's behaviour seems defiant.[92] Furthering his position, Ellul argues that the fledgling urban world is set up in contradiction to the curse as an alternative to Eden.[93] In this act of rebellion, Cain has set the trajectory for humanity where he "forces creation to follow his destiny… of slavery and sin, and his revolt."[94]

Ellul provides an overly pessimistic assessment of the city since he can only see Cain's actions as rebellion. Hamilton notes Cain's self-preservation but he does not conclude that the urban development is evil.[95] McKeown shares this perspective identifying Cain's actions as rebellious but does not follow Ellul's train of thought to the terminus of an inherent malevolence.[96] Von Rad suggests caution, since the founding of a city is not irreconcilable with the curse on Cain's life.[97] Ellul's argument is helpful even though it is overstated. The

[91] Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster press, 1972) 107. The Hebrew of the text suggests that there is a correlation being made between the land (*Nod*) and Cain's status (*Nad*).
[92] Ellul, *City*, 1-9.
[93] Ellul, *City*, 5-6.
[94] Ellul, *City*, 7.
[95] Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 238.
[96] James McKeown, *Genesis*, Two Horizons Commentary, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2008), 604/5872, Kindle.
[97] Von Rad, *Genesis*, 110.

Cain narrative does pose a challenge to viewing the city positively. Yet, it is unfair to conclude from the text that Cain's act of city building is sinful.

Linthicum does not address the Cain narrative which is a weakness in his work. Alexander's contribution on the other hand does not shy away from this passage, even if his engagement is brief. He argues that the reader must remember what has preceded, highlighting the importance of canonical context.[98] God's design for humanity to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28) is being worked out in the actions of Cain.[99] I would argue that by developing the first urban settlement Cain is pursuing the mandate to fulfil the divine design issued to his parents. Kline advocates this position, recognising that the first city is a development which issues from God's common grace to humanity.[100] Bartholomew offers a helpful warning; city development must not be viewed in a vacuum.[101] Though he argues for Cain's son as the architect of the first city the implications remain, suggesting that the urban culture which develops will be tainted.[102] However, as Sunquist notes, "When Cain built a city he was not continuing in sin but responding to the cultural mandate of ordering and naming".[103] Urban aspirations are complex but are not inherently evil. I contend that the first city is neutral; a meeting place of wonder and warning for humanity concerning their relationship with God and each other.

Babylon

The construction site of Shinar is foundational for the city motif in the canon of Scripture.[104] It is particularly important to this research as it is the initial influence on the

[98] Alexander, *City*, 272/4040, Kindle.
[99] Alexander, *City*, 272/4040, Kindle.
[100] Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations For a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene: Wipf& Stock, 2006), 166.
[101] Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian view of place* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 34.
[102] Bartholomew, *Mortals*, 34-35.
[103] Sunquist, *Mission*, 346.
[104] Unknown, "Babel", in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* edited by Leyland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit & Tremper Longman III eds. (Downers Grove, Leicester: IVP, 1998), 66-67; Unknown, "Babylon", in *Imagery*

material which will be studied in Revelation 17:1-18:24.[105] As before Ellul points to the inherent negativity of this passage.[106] However, this time he is not alone with even the most positive contributors to the discussion like Alexander[107] and Linthicum[108] standing in agreement. In line with the aims of this study it is important to clarify the use of *Babel* terminology. Occurring over two hundred times in the Hebrew Bible, it is most often translated as Babylon with only Gen 10:10 and Gen 11:9 acting as exceptions.[109] Given the shared geographical location with the future city of Babylon, it stands to reason that this is the same city in its earliest manifestation. As well as making sense of the common use of the Hebrew word and shared geography, it also connects the long shadow Babylon casts over the storyline of scripture (e.g. Isa 13:1-14:23; 21:1-10, 47; Jer 25; 50-51) to the passages in Revelation 17:1-18:24.

Does this account suggest the inherent evil of the city? Von Rad invites the reader to recognise the Babylon incident as God's judgement on self-aggrandising humanity.[110] However, Ellul disagrees asserting that God has not only cursed the efforts of those constructing Babylon, but the city concept.[111] Rather than seeing this passage as anti-urban, many scholars argue that the establishment of Babylon highlights the great human problem of sin and rebellion against God. For example, Hamilton observes that what brings God displeasure at Babylon is "the sin of pride and pretentious humanism."[112] Schreiner comes to a similar conclusion, stating that this city is the "apex of anthropocentrism instead of

edited by Ryken et. al. (Downers Grove, Leicester: IVP, 1998), 68-69; Bill T. Arnold "Babylon" in *NDBT* edited by Alexander et al. (2000), 393-394.
[105] Bauckham, *Theology*, 5; Linthicum, *City of God*, 258/6865, Kindle; Tabb, *All Things*, 164.
[106] Ellul, *City*, 15-20.
[107] Alexander, *City*, 272-348/4040, Kindle.
[108] Linthicum, *City*, 249-269/6865, Kindle.
[109] Alexander, *City*, 315/4040, Kindle; See also Arnold "Babylon", 393-394.
[110] Von Rad, *Genesis*, 148.
[111] Ellul, *City*, 20.
[112] Hamilton, *Genesis*, 356.

theocentrism"[113] something which McKeown develops noting that "they [the Babelites] are trying to reach God in the wrong way with the wrong motives. Great buildings in themselves do not bring people closer to God."[114]

Where human effort sought to make *bāb-ilim*, "the gate of God" it becomes the ground-zero of human confusion, *bālal*.[115] Babylon's origins display both the broken relationship with God and the internal desire in humanity to reach divinity (Gen 11:4-5). In light of Gen 1:28 Hock argues that the builders "understep rather than overstep heir human limitations."[116] The bricks and mortar of Babylon are not inherently evil. In a fallen world they are fragile, taking on the various shades of surrounding society, bowing to the objects of worship belonging to the human architects who have replaced God. Here we have an important theme for this research. The centre of worship makes or breaks a city.

Sodom and Gomorrah

In response to the Babelite rebellion God scatters the peoples (Gen 11:9b). We are then introduced to another urban antitype in the narrative of Genesis (Gen 13:13; 19:1-19). Like Babylon, the silhouettes of Sodom and Gomorrah are never far from biblical thought (Deut 32:32; Isa 1:9-10; 3:9; 13:19; Jer 23:14; 49:17-18; 50:39-40; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:44-58; Amos 4:11; Mt 10:5-15; 11:20-24; Lk 17:28-36; 2 Pet 2:6-11; Jude 7; Rev 11:8). Although the Sodom motif exerts a great deal of influence, both Linthicum and Alexander do not handle this passage directly[117] but refer to the Sodomesque allusions seen across the canon.

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[113] Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in his Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013) 15.
[114] McKeown, *Genesis,* 987/5872, Kindle.
[115] For discussions about the play on words between *Bāb-ilim* (Gate of God) and *bālal* (to confuse) see Bill T. Arnold, "Babylonians" in *Peoples of the Old Testament World,* edited by edited by Alfred J. Hoerth, Edwin M. Yamamuchi & Gerald L. Mattingly, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 43-45; McKeown, *Genesis,* 987/5872, Kindle.
[116] Andreas Hock, 'From Babel to the New Jerusalem (Gen 11,1-9 and Rev 21:1-22:5)', *Biblica Vol.89, No.1* (2008), 111.
[117] Linthicum, *City of God,* 621/6865, Kindle. Alexander, *City of God,* 1269/4040; 1837/4040, Kindle.

Like the passages in Revelation (Rev 17-18) the sin of Sodom is described in graphic detail. Outcries from the cities have been heard by God (Gen 18:20-21).[118] A cross generational will to gang rape the angelic visitors (Gen 19:4-5) and the exploitation of marginal women (Gen 19:7-8)[119] paint a picture of kaleidoscopic wickedness. Ellul highlights "the absolutely ignominious accumulation of sin"[120] as the prominent feature of this narrative, and on this point I agree. That said, there needs to be an acknowledgment that individual acts are also in view, particularly in the realm of human sexuality. Hamilton,[121] McKeown[122] and Towney[123] are among scholars who uphold that writing sexual sin out of this account would be inaccurate.[124]

This bleak picture is far from the ideal model of the city which Fritz discusses. In the ANE the city was a place of physical and social security.[125] Yet in Sodom we see the opposite, leading Matthews to conclude that all the benefits of living in a city had been inverted.[126] From ethics (Gen 19:4-5) to ecology (Gen 19:24-25) we are shown that rejection of God has wide ranging consequences on life.[127] We must be clear that the decree against Sodom and Gomorrah is not a divine rejection of the city.[128] Within the confines of this text we see Lot granted divine permission to relocate to another city (Gen 19:19-22). Ellul changes tone noting that Sodom "is condemned not so much for being a city, but rather

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[118] See Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Nottingham: IVP, 2004), 222.
[119] For a good discussion see Lyn M. Bechtel. "Boundary Issues in Genesis 19:1-38" in *Escaping Eden: New Feminist Perspectives on the Bible*, edited by Harold C. Washington, Susan Lochrie Graham & Pamela Thimmes, (New York: New York University Press), 22-40.
[120] Ellul, *City of God*, 64.
[121] James M. Hamilton Jr. *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgement: A Biblical Theology,* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 85.
[122] McKeown, *Genesis*, 1471/5872, Kindle.
[123] W. Sibley Towner, *Genesis*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 172.
[124] This is a point worth noting as it has an impact on the passages in Rev 17-18.
[125] Volkmar Fritz, *The City in Ancient Israel*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 19. See also Robert R. Wilson, "The City in the Old Testament", in Peter S. Hawkins (ed.) *Civitas: Religious Interpretations of the City* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 3-4.
[126] Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26* (NAC), (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 232.
[127]McKeown, *Genesis*, 109.
[128] S.J. Andrews, "City, Town, Camp", in T. Desmond Alexander & David W. Baker (eds.), *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch,* (Downers Grove, Nottingham: IVP, 2003), 130.

because of the association between her and man's particular sin. In his revolt man has outdone even the city and becomes himself totally responsible."[129] Urban negativity remains however Ellul touches the root which determines the strength or weakness of a city; humanity united against God or united to God. As we seek to develop a picture of the city in Revelation a seedbed has been laid for us in the judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah. Residing in a city involves interacting with its cultural norms and values. However, this residence need not mean allegiance or complicity.

Origins revisited

There is another vision of the city which calls into question the perspective of an antiurban thrust in redemptive history. Wilson suggests that the text of the OT cannot support a purely negative conclusion, and as such a nostalgic reading of the canon which romanticises nomadic wilderness living does not withstand rigorous exegetical criticism.[130] Rather than seeing the city as the object of divine displeasure it is more helpful to view urban aspirations from the perspective of divine design.

Locating the origin of this alternative urban vision in Eden may seem counterintuitive. However, the narrative surrounding this ecological and zoological utopia has more to offer than images of paradise lost.[131] Like Wilson, Benjamin notes that "Romanticism in the eighteenth century branded the city as an unfit environment for humans", and therefore rejects Ellul's abrogation of the city.[132] He continues to argue that "in creation stories there is no naturalism or primitivism."[133] Aiming for a rural ideal or a return to simplicity is not the intended outcome of the Eden narrative. Wenham's suggestion that the images of Eden stem

[129] Ellul, *City of God*, 63.
[130] Wilson, *Civitas*, 5-6.
[131] Don C. Benjamin, "Stories of Adam and Eve", in *Problems in Biblical Theology: Essays in Honour of Rolf Knierim*, edited by Henry T. C. Sun & Keith L. Eades, (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 43.
[132] Benjamin, *Stories*, 43.
[133] Benjamin, *Stories*, 43.

from royal gardens in the ANE, cultivated and enclosed space, make more sense and it is a case which aligns well with the surrounding material of the text.[134] This is supported by Bartholomew who suggests that Eden is "bounded, probably by walls; carefully landscaped and intensively cultivated with orchards…in light of its urban connotations in the ancient Near East, Eden may well have included buildings."[135] Bartholomew cannot assert this for sure, since it does not appear directly in the text, and it would be wise to hold this final proposal tentatively. However, both Wenham and Bartholomew illuminate the garden in ways which helpfully align with John's vision of new Jerusalem.

Alexander[136] and Beale[137] pick up these ideas describing Eden as a prototypical temple. Others such as Conn & Ortiz[138] and Um & Buzzard[139] discuss this idea but develop it to see the first temple as the urban world in prototypical form. Here I will highlight two avenues. First, Eden is identified as a particular place, designed for particular people with a particular purpose. Adam and Eve are to form and develop a culture (Gen 1:28)[140] which will extend their service in Eden as priestly vice-regents (Gen 2:15).[141] Edgar notes that the cultural mandate is an all-encompassing task,[142] a point which is developed by Conn & Ortiz who argue that this "could just as easily be called an urban mandate."[143] Kline provides more nuance, stating that "the cultural mandate given at creation was a mandate to build the city."[144] While this interpretation is insightful it must be held in relation to the priestly task identified by Beale. Humanity is not created for the sole purpose of city development.

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[134] G.J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, (Waco: Word books, 1987) 61.
[135] Bartholomew, *Mortals*, 27.
[136] Alexander, *Eden*, 13-73.
[137] G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, Leicester: IVP, 2004), 81-87.
[138] Conn & Ortiz, *Urban*, 86-87.
[139] Um & Buzzard, *Cities*, 811-901/2870, Kindle.
[140] William Edgar, *Created and Creating: A Biblical Theology of Culture* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2017), 166.
[141] See Beale, *The Temple*, 83.
[142] Edgar, *Created*, 166.
[143] Conn & Ortiz, *Urban*, 87.
[144] Kline, *Kingdom*, 101.

The cultural mandate is filled with progressive implications. In light of Eden's resources (Gen 2:10-15) Um & Buzzard reason that Adam and Eve are set apart with the means "to produce agriculture, architecture, the arts, science, family life, business, and commerce, and to develop a God honouring civilisation under God's reign."[145] Far from being overlords ripping open Eden's treasures,[146] Adam and Eve were to harness the potential of the garden as royal priests. As Alexander[147] and Beale[148] argue they were to extend the presence of God throughout creation. When these details are aligned it is possible to discern an end goal of global worship which is urban in nature.

Secondly, Edenic imagery finds its climax in city imagery. Initially these images are linked with the temple such as God's presence (Gen 3:8; Lev 26:12; Deut 23:14), the building materials (Gen 2:12; Ex 25:11-29; 1 Kings 6:20-22) and the tree of life (Gen 2:9; Ex 25:31-36).[149] By the climax of Revelation these images have been redeployed as urban images. [150] New Jerusalem has a river flowing from the royal throne through the main street (Gen 2:10; Rev 22:1-2) with trees of life standing either side of the route (Gen 2:9; Rev 22:2). In a similar way, new Jerusalem is abundantly resource rich (Gen 2:11-12; Rev 21:15-21) and is also surrounded by walls demonstrating the expansion of the garden of God across the earth (Gen 2:8; Rev 21:12-14). Nuance is required if this perspective is to stand, something which Beale's work contributes to as he does not leap directly to urbanism. Instead he points to the essential role of priestly worship which is to both form and emanate from culture, urban or otherwise, and in turn infuse every dimension of human life.[151]

[145] Um & Buzzard, *Cities*, 822/2870, Kindle.
[146] Norbert Lohfink, *Theology of the Pentateuch* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 10.
[147] Alexander, *Eden*, 20-31.
[148] Beale, *Temple*, 81-87.
[149] Beale, *Temple*, 66-80.
[150] Conn & Ortiz, *Urban*, 87.
[151] Beale, *Temple*, 82.

Eden is not described in conventional urban terminology, but the building blocks of a mandate and resources are present to develop a city. There is also a developing thread in the canon which repurposes temple imagery with urban contours. Life is to be formed around obedient worship of God, leading to a movement of obedient human creativity and rule covering the earth.[152] God's priestly vice-regents were to allow blessing to overflow from the garden, representing and reflecting his character and glory wherever they went.[153] It is therefore plausible to suggest that the city is an overflow of the cultural mandate in Eden. This framework of blessing and obedience is helpful in assessing John's use of the city motif. Like any dimension of life, cities will be better places where God is central, not peripheral.

Cities of refuge

If Eden provides the basis for what cities should be, the remaining passages highlight what cities could be in a fallen world. We see this in the covenant code, where the provision of community is made for someone who has committed manslaughter (Ex 21:12-14). These places are later identified as cities (Num 35:9-15), which Pitkänen stresses are a unique provision in the ANE.[154] Cole suggests that these cities were for the individual in question.[155] However we can see these cities fulfil a wider purpose encompassing the whole of Israelite society as Barmash shows. The perpetrator needed a lasting place of security to live without fear of retribution, while at the same time wider society had to act so as to restrict the ripple effect of the unintended death.[156] Cities of refuge act as an example of how the city offers a solution to the problem posed by sin's effects in the world; a contingency for both individuals

[152] Bartholomew, *Mortals,* 40.
[153] Bartholomew, *Mortals,* 83.
[154] Pekka Pitkänen, *A commentary on Numbers: Narrative, Ritual and Colonialism*, (London: Routledge, 2018), 205.
[155] R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers*, (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2000), 550.
[156] Pamela Barmash, *Homicide in the biblical world*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 203-204.

and society.[157] As David Smith observes, "these cities were thus intended to contribute to the social health and *shalom* of the covenant nation."[158] Though a person may be confined to a certain area for a period of time, they are alive, they are not isolated, and have the potential for rehabilitation in community.

However there is a stark warning for those who reject the limits placed on their lives. If they choose to leave the city of safety, they are rejecting God's gracious provision (Ex 21:12-14) and there is no protection from the *Gō'ēl* (Num 35:26-29). For our purposes in Revelation there are two important details to note. First, assuming a place of security in another city is not advised, and secondly presuming on God's grace is not recommended. Cities have the potential to showcase God's gracious and merciful provision to deal with humanity's errant nature.

Yahweh's city

We move now to one of the most prominent motifs in scripture, Jerusalem. Due to limits of this research only two areas will be noted. The first point concerns the repurposing of Jerusalem. Several writers highlight the significance of Jerusalem's capture and settlement (2 Sam 5:6-12) such as Baldwin,[159] Bergen,[160] Gordon[161] and Hertzberg.[162] They each show that life was radically altered socially, politically, economically, culturally and theologically. However, these contributors do not define Jerusalem as a repurposed city. Although Hertzberg highlights the antiquity of the city, he does not advance a discussion about Jerusalem's repurposing.[163] The wider context of Jerusalem's capture shows God taking the

[157] T. A. Clarke, "cities of refuge" in *Pentateuch,* edited by Alexander & Baker, 125-28.
[158] Smith, *Seeking,* 140.
[159] Joyce G. Baldwin, *1&2Samuel,* TOTC, (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988), 211.
[160] Robert D. Bergen *1&2 Samuel,* NAC (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 319-320.
[161] Robert P. Gordon, *1&2 Samuel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 225.
[162] Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *1&2 Samuel: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 266.
[163] Hertzberg, *1&2 Samuel*, 268.

urban settlement of the Jebusites and transforming it during the reigns of David and Solomon into the divine centre of the world. Alexander[164] and Beale[165] highlight the significance of this event, and it's Edenic overture. Yet, they do not define this city as repurposed. David does build up Jerusalem (2 Sam 5:9), however it is not *creatio ex nihilo*; it is the city transformed. Developing a biblical theology of the city requires an exploration of the concept of repurposing a city in light of the texts in Revelation.

A second point of note is the intricate relationship concerning Israel's election, the city of Jerusalem and global responsibility.[166] What started in Eden extends throughout salvation history with a particular people (Gen 12:1-3) and a particular city. We notice that the Zion/Jerusalem motif is used to describe the perfect city where God's law is proclaimed (Isa 2:2-4), a city which acts as a beacon of salvation for the world (Ps 87: 4-5; Isa 62:1-2) and the place of eternal security (Ps 46:4-5; Isa 66:7-14).[167] The repurposing of Jerusalem was God's design to display a new dawn for humanity where he would rule and reign, extending blessing to the nations of the world.

Um & Buzzard briefly touch this theme,[168] as does David Smith. He argues that Jerusalem "provided a stage on which it became possible to show to the world an alternative form of urban existence."[169] Linthicum agrees, adding that "an idealized Jerusalem is celebrated as city as it was meant to be – a city belonging to God."[170] Rebellion remains within the people of God, shining a light on the inherent tension of the urban world; people do not want to live as God intended and it dampens the exemplary light of Jerusalem.[171]

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[164] Alexander, *Eden*, 43.
[165] Beale, *Temple*, 107-109.
[166] Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach*, (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 180; Alexander, *Eden*, 43.
[167] Paul R. House, *Isaiah Volume 1: Chapters 1-27*, (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2019), 32. House frames his work around a sin-Zion structure, highlighting the importance of the city in the purposes of salvation history.
[168] Um & Buzzard, *Cities*, 934/2870 Kindle.
[169] Smith, *Seeking*, 142.
[170] Linthicum, *City of God*, 269/6865 Kindle.
[171] Sunquist, *Mission*, 341.

However, as Um & Buzzard observe "being in a city where the presence of God dwells has always been an essential human desire."[172] True city living was to be found in an urban sanctuary which would act as a gathering place for humanity. This repurposed city was to exist as a shining example, reorientating the nations by providing the place and the people which would lead to the presence of God.

Shalom in Babylon

Israel did not embrace God's design for Jerusalem and found themselves as refugees in Babylon (Ps 137:1-3). The exile is catastrophic since there is no apparent access to the Lord[173] and the city of Babylon (Gen 11:1-9) has grown into a global empire.[174] Divine design seems to have been consumed by human evil, making Ellul's case more compelling.[175] However, God's judgement clearly falls on his people and what they have made of Jerusalem. This is not a declaration against cities since the context of exile produces one of the most inspiring urban texts in the Bible (Jer 29:4-7).[176] Judgement, and the ensuing identity crisis, are used by God to relay the foundations of urbanism set out in the cultural mandate.[177] And yet engagement with the urban thrust of this text is side-lined in the main commentaries for discussion of how true and false prophecy should be discerned. Undoubtedly this is an important aspect of the passage which needs to be handled with care. However, to bypass detailed comment on the welfare of the city is an oversight.

Katho addresses this confusing call to urban renewal while also handling the issue of reliable prophecy.[178] He demonstrates that by making clear that the exile is his act God is

[172] Um & Buzzard, *Cities*, 914/2870 Kindle.
[173] Bungishabaku Katho, "Seek the Peace and Prosperity of the City", *OTE 26/2* (2013) p.357.
[174] Alexander, *City*, 1812/4040; Conn & Ortiz, *Urban*, 101-102.
[175] Ellul, *City*, 44.
[176] This could also be argued from the book of Jonah, particularly Jon 4:5-11.
[177] Conn & Ortiz, *Urban*, 101-102; Edgar, *Created*, 204.
[178] Katho, *"*peace*"*, 348-364.

helping his people to see past the false prophets (Jer 28:2-4) and the socio-political moment they lived in.[179] Such paradoxical positivity could only arise once the people of God recognised that "Babylon is not the enemy but that they have been punished because of their breaking of the covenant."[180] Seeking the שׁלוֹם of Babylon is therefore inextricably linked to their own שׁלוֹם.[181] This is not to abrogate Babylon's behaviour. There will come a time of judgement for this city and her empire (Jer 50-51).[182] What seems to be clear from the text is that although "astonishing and counterintuitive"[183] loving the city which is aligned against them is the way in which God's people enter into what it means to be his covenant people.

It is worth mentioning that the controversial pro-Babylonian attitude did not mean a path of blind accommodation or cultural assimilation on part of God's people.[184] As Calvin observes, Jeremiah never suggests indulgence or permanent residence in Babylon.[185] There is mention of constructing houses (Jer 29:5); however, this can be understood as provision for an everyday necessity of life. Built into the prophetic word is the promise of conclusion (Jer 29:10). The seventy-year period was as an ever-present reminder of the promised end and the possibility of fresh beginning leading to what Calvin describes as "a state of suspense".[186] With future blessing on the horizon the people of God were given a bedrock of hope upon which the rediscovery of the cultural mandate could take place. This now and not yet tension runs throughout scripture, is present in Jeremiah's urban declaration and is prominent in the book of Revelation. Neither insurrection nor isolation are the path of God's people in the

[179] Katho, "Peace", 354.
[180] Katho, "Peace", 362.
[181] Katho, "Peace", 362.
[182] Alexander, *City of God,* 1812/4040 Kindle.
[183] Edgar, *Created,* 204.
[184] Edgar, *Created,* 206.
[185] John Calvin, *Jeremiah,* Vol 3. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1989), 418. It is interesting to note that Calvin writing during the reformation in Geneva tackles aspects of the urban contours of this passage in ways that modern commentators have not.
[186] Calvin, *Jeremiah*, 418.

fallen urban world. Rather in Jeremiah we see that a ghetto mentality is replaced with the rediscovery of covenant vitality.

Second temple period

Though space does not permit an expansive discussion it is unwise to ignore changes to cities during the second temple period. From the end of the OT cities flourish in the ANE and Mediterranean with the *polis* of Athens acting as a conceptual fountainhead.[187] Watson provides a helpful sketch of three key stages during this period: the classical *polis*, the Hellenistic *polis* and the Roman city.[188] We will not go into these stages in detail, but it is no exaggeration to say that these developments profoundly shape the urban world of the NT since "Ancient Greek and Roman societies were organised around their cities."[189]

One detail to note in this development is the topography of Greco-Roman cities. I will highlight three features which connect with the descriptions of Babylon and New Jerusalem. First, most cities were situated in important locations allowing for widespread political and cultural influence. Urban development was key in solidifying Alexander the Great's conquest and would also prove crucial to the expansion of the Roman empire (Rev 2-3; 17:1, 15; 21:10).[190] Secondly, they were surrounded by walls and gates to provide security and protection for those living inside (Rev 21:12-14, 25).[191] Third, city layouts in the Greco-Roman world were not haphazard like their ANE counterparts.[192] From the fifth century (BC) city design followed the orthogonal principles developed by Hippodamos of Miletus.[193] Roman cities of the 1st century would be constructed on such principles with the addition of a

[187] Peter Hall, *Cities in Civilisation,* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), 24-68; Wilson, *Metropolis,* 67-90.
[188] Watson, 'Cities', 212-215.
[189] James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity*, (Downers Grove: IVP, 1999), 48.
[190] Watson, "Cities", 213-214.
[191] Jeffers, *Greco-Roman*, 51.
[192] Jeffers, *Greco-Roman*, 51.
[193] Wilson, *Metropolis*, 84-85.

notable intersection of main streets running north-south (*cardo)* and east-west (*decamus*) (Rev 21:15-17, 24b; 22:2a).[194] I want to suggest that these cultural norms of the Greco-Roman city influence the depiction of new Jerusalem. John sees the city coming down from God (Rev 21:2), but what he sees seems to have some consistency with the city as he, and the churches he was writing to (Rev 1:11), would have understood it. Surely there are hints at common grace in this overlap. What humanity has constructed is perfected by God's goodness.

[194] Watson, "Cities", 214.

Chapter 4: The Fall of Babylon

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the OT is replete with urban imagery. Some of these images point towards the city as a site of rebellion, while others suggest that the city is a positive, God appointed development in human existence. Each of these images provide the necessary foundations for interpreting the climactic end of John's apocalypse where one city is "Fallen" (Rev 18:2) and another is established (Rev 21:2). We turn now to exegetical work in Revelation following the contrasts between the cities of Babylon (Rev 17:1-18:24) and new Jerusalem (Rev 21:1-22:5). Two things will become clearer having done this. First, we will see that the potential of urban development contained in the mandate (Gen 1:28) and resources (Gen 2:10-12) of Eden are central to God's eschatological purposes.[195] In other words, the city is not inherently evil. The next logical step is to show that Babylon is not judged for being a city. Disfiguring the purpose of God is the reason for judgement.

Underpinning the exegetical work in the following chapters are three contextual factors. First, the images under discussion are grounded in the 1st century world which we can see from both the intended recipients of the letter (Rev 1:11) and the general consensus of scholarship.[196] Secondly, the images are also rooted in the wider biblical canon. A surface level reading of these texts should evoke strong connections with the OT. Further study shows that we are handling an intricate reapplication of OT imagery for the churches of the 1st century urban world.[197] Thirdly, the ambiguity of apocalyptic literature suggests that our task is not to decode every detail. Instead, as Collins notes, the text may achieve its effect precisely "through the element of uncertainty."[198] Precision is not always the goal.

Two questions come to the foreground in Revelation 17:1-18:24. The first surrounds the identity of the great city under discussion. Who or what is the great city (Rev 11:8; 16:19-

[195] Alexander, *City,* 19.
[196] Beale, *Revelation,* 4-27; Fanning, *Revelation,* 28-30.
[197] For a discussion of Revelation's use of the OT see Beale, *Revelation,* 76-99.
[198] Collins, *Imagination,* 20.

20)? Following this is a second question; why is God bringing judgement on this city? I aim to show that John presents Babylon as a deceptive alternative to God's design for the city. Babylon can be seen as the epitome of the tower of Babel on a global scale (Gen 11:1-9). When humanity reject God they also reject God's design for the city. Instead of a place for God honouring worship, security and flourishing, it becomes a wilderness of deceit, abuse and idolatry.

The city's mysterious identity

We begin by seeking an answer to the first question: what is the identity of the great city? Babylon is not a random insert at the climax of the apocalypse. There have been glimpses of this city across the canon (Gen 11:1-9; Isa 21:1-17; Jer 50:1-51:64). There have also been shades of Babylon in Revelation (Rev 14:8, 16:9), but before we come to these we are introduced to "the great city" (Rev 11:8). As the narrative moves forward there is growing expectation that the great city will experience cataclysmic destruction (Rev 16:19-20). This judgement is not partial, differing from the preceding seal (Rev 6:1-8:5) and trumpet (Rev 8:6-11:19) judgements where there is a pause. No pause emphasises the fullness and finality of the judgement which is about to fall on the city in question. If this does not provide clarity, the echoes of theophany in Rev 16:17-21 corelate with Rev 4:5-6 highlighting that it is God who draws near to judge.[199]

Mystery surrounds this doomed city (Rev 17:5) and only God can reveal her true identity.[200] To make sense of the mystery I propose that we examine the idiomatic statement ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη which occurs 8 times in the book of Revelation (Rev 11:8; 16:19; 17:18, 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21). Its first use describes the location where faithful followers of Jesus are

[199] John Christopher Thomas & Frank D. Macchia, *Revelation* (THNTC), (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 288.
[200] Tabb, *All Things*, 169.

opposed by the beast and subsequently killed (Rev 11:8). There is little in the surrounding context to give clear detail about the identity of "the great city" which has led to a lack of scholarly consensus. Biguzzi presents five options concerning the identity of the city[201] which I have condensed to three possible options representing the main scholarly perspectives; Babylon/Jerusalem, Babylon/Rome and Babylon/Rome as transtemporal city.

Babylon/Jerusalem

First, the great city in Rev 11:8 can be read as Jerusalem.[202] To make this case, Fanning presents a literal reading of Rev 11:8c, "where their Lord was crucified". He argues that this is a strong reference to Jerusalem given the use of ὅπου (where).[203] Since Jerusalem was the location of the Lord's crucifixion it makes sense that this would be the city in question (Matt 27:32-33; Mark 15:20c-22; Luke 23:25c-26, 32-33; John 19:16b-18). Another strand of this argument is the reference to Jerusalem as a great city. This occurs once in OT literature (Jer 22:8); however, most occurrences are from non-canonical literature (*Sib. Or.* 5.154, 226, 413; *Apoc. Elijah* 4.13). Although Fanning is willing to admit that Jerusalem is not explicitly mentioned, he strongly advocates that this verse can only point in one direction.[204]

For a number of reasons this interpretation is fragile. Take the use of ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη in the remainder of the apocalypse. From this point on it is always used in conjunction with Babylon (Rev 16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21) making it highly unlikely to mean Jerusalem in this one instance. Alongside this, the reader is instructed to engage with

[201] Biguzzi., "Rome", 371-372.
[202] Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, (London: T&T Clark, 2000), 279-301; Fanning, *Revelation*, 426-427; George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 157-158. It should be noted that this reading tends to be found in a dispensational framework. For a discussion on this see Tabb, *All Things*, 165-166.
[203] BDAG, 576; Fanning, *Revelation*, 334-335.
[204] Fanning, *Revelation*, 334-335.

the verse in light of its spiritual meaning. In Revelation 11:8a the term πνευματικῶς [205] communicates the sense of a spiritual reality or a prophetic awareness concerning the cities of "Sodom and Egypt".[206] If that is the case, then it would make sense that "the great city" should be read in light of this too.[207] Sodom and Egypt are not simply parenthetical comment on the character of Jerusalem. Nor are they accurate descriptions of the city of Jerusalem in the OT.[208] This leads Smalley to conclude that "the 'city' (Rev 11:8) in question is not to be understood in literal terms; rather, the idea should be interpreted figuratively, and through prophetic and spitritual eyes."[209]

It should also be noted this interpretation too readily reads "Sodom and Egypt" as figurative, but does not extend the same hermeneutic to the third phrase of the verse.[210] Furthermore, the strongest element of the argument, the preposition ὅπου, is used elsewhere in the book to designate spiritual geography not necessarily literal locations (Rev 2:13; 12:6, 14; 14:4; 20:10; cf. 17:3 with 17:9).[211] Finally, it should be noted that Jesus was not crucified in the city of Jerusalem, but outside of the city (Heb 13:12).[212] This is not a detail to be overlooked in making a decision about the identity of the city in question. That Jesus fulfilled the role of atoning sacrifice outside the city has deeply rooted meaning (Lev 16:6-10; 23-28). In light of these factors Beale has concluded that Jerusalem is an improbable designation for the great city, with which I agree.[213]

[205] BDAG, 678-679.
[206] Smalley, *Revelation,* 281.
[207] Fanning, *Revelation,* 334.
[208] Mounce, *Revelation,* 220-221.
[209] Smalley, *Revelation,* 281.
[210] Tabb, *All Things,* 166.
[211] Beale, *Revelation,* 592.
[212] Paul Gardener, *Revelation,* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 158.
[213] Beale, *Revelation,* 592.

Babylon/Rome

Another interpretation of ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη is the city of Rome as it aligns well with its use throughout the book and also the connection made with Babylon.[214] The contextual setting of Revelation provides extra clarity (Rev 1:11). Details such as ruling the kings of earth (Rev 17:18), being called Babylon (Rev 18:10), the centre of operations for a vast fine goods network (Rev 18:16) and shipping trade (Rev 18:19) make Rome the most plausible referent of the coming divine judgement.[215]

This context also helps to interpret the feminine imagery of the texts. Ancient cities were often personified as women and Rome was the pinnacle, the great mother of the 1st century world.[216] However, rather than receiving praise and exaltation as the goddess Roma, John exposes her true identity as the "great harlot" (Rev 17:1). She is a mother, but of a very different kind (Rev 17:5). This literary stroke paints Rome as a faithful follower of her OT antecedent Babylon.[217] It should be noted that Revelation is not unique in Christian or early Jewish literature in making this connection. Babylon is often used as a cipher for the city of Rome (1 Pet 5:13; *4 Ezra* 3:1-2, 16:1; *2 Bar* 11:1, 33:1), the meeting place of Sodom's vice, Egypt's tyranny and Jerusalem's spiritual blindness.[218] This concoction of OT identities leads to a greater and stronger "Babylon" echoing the sentiments of the Shinar plain (Gen 11:1-9).

One further detail is the allusion to Babylon as the woman who sits on seven hills (Rev 17:9).[219] For the initial recipients of the book this is an unambiguous reference to Rome's geographical location.[220] Aune has sought to add weight to this interpretation by

[214] Bauckham, *Climax*, 338-350; Caird, *Revelation*, 138, 209; Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 79, 93; Mounce, *Revelation*, 220-221; Paul, *Revelation*, 202, 273.
[215] Paul, *Revelation*, 201.
[216] Bauckham, *Theology*, 126.
[217] Bauckham, *Theology*, 126.
[218] Caird, *Revelation*, 138.
[219] Bauckham, *Theology*, 126.
[220] Mounce, *Revelation*, 315; Paul, *Revelation*, 284.

highlighting the possibility of an ekphratic commentary on the *Dea Roma* coin.[221] He asserts that Rev 17:1-18 is a scathing commentary on an art work which was later replicated on coinage in Asia during the Vespasian era.[222] Aune's argument is not conclusive and has been described by Smalley as tenuous.[223] Even though I agree with Smalley, it is yet another factor adding to the growing weight of evidence proposing Rome as the identity of the great city.

A flaw is highlighted by Fanning. Can Rome be the referent of the statement "where the Lord was crucified" (Rev 11:8)? There are good grounds for saying that it can. In much the same way as the reader is called to exercise wisdom in interpreting the seven hills in Revelation 17:9, the same discretion should be applied to reading Revelation 11:8 spiritually. Also, as Fiorenza argues, the gospel narrative makes it clear that Jesus was tried under Roman law (John 18:28-32), and as such, "the Romans were legally responsible for the execution of Jesus."[224] It should be restated that the NT writers are explicit in their accounts that Jesus was not executed *in* Jerusalem, but outside the city gate (Matt 27:32-33; Mark 15:20c-22; Luke 23:25c-26, 32-33; John 19:16b-18; Heb 13:12-12). Although Jerusalem collaborated in the murder of the Messiah, Rome dealt the death sentence to Jesus Christ; and Rome were continuing in a similar trajectory with Christ's faithful witnesses (Rev 11:8; 17:6a; 18:24).

Babylon/Rome transtemporal city

The final perspective proposes Babylon/Rome as a transtemporal city; a reappearing referent crossing different periods of time.[225] Building from the historical and contextual foundations of the preceding proposal, the reader sees that the mysterious identity of the city

[221] Aune, *Revelation*, 919-928.
[222] Aune, *Revelation*, 921.
[223] Smalley, *Revelation*, 427.
[224] Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, (Augsburg: Fortress Press, 1991), 78.
[225] Beale, *Revelation* , 48.

in question is not accidental but deliberate. In such a case, Babylon, the great city, can be seen as a transtemporal symbol; a reappearing referent representing the world unified against the purposes of God and his people.[226]

This proposal works on a number of levels. First, it takes the call to read Revelation 11:8 with spiritual eyes seriously providing a base to interpret the identity of Babylon in Revelation 17:1-18:24. It also aligns well with the recurring appearance of Babylon in the wider canon of Scripture. As we have noted Babylon's shadow hangs over the OT. From Nimrod's seeds of urban aspiration (Gen 10:10) to the self-aggrandising project of Shinar (Gen 11:1-9), this city flourishes in all the wrong directions. Furthermore, reading Daniel 4:30, "Is not this great Babylon", alongside Revelation 16:19, "and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath", it is plausible that Nebuchadnezzar's words have found a new lease of life in Rome.[227] Tabb shines light on a key weakness of the preceding argument; "Rome is not 'Babylon' without remainder".[228] Rather it is the most recent iteration of the transtemporal world-city.

Beale also argues that "the great city" be understood as "the ungodly system which would include Rome, Jerusalem, and all other wicked people groups."[229] This comment develops the argument, expanding the identity of the city a step further. We are dealing with a transtemporal world-city. But we are also dealing with the wide ranging influence of the system which that city creates. Gorman argues that to truly understand the identity of the city in question, we must recognise that "Babylon" is an image of empire coming under divine critique.[230] Thus, John's city motif, in this context, can be seen as the transtemporal imperial world-city.

[226] Beale, *Revelation*, 590-592; Caird, *Revelation*, 138; Tabb, *All Things*, 167-168.
[227] Tabb, *All Things*, 167-168.
[228] Tabb, *All Things*, 167.
[229] Beale, *Revelation*, 843.
[230] Gorman, *Revelation*, 156-161.

Perhaps understandably, this is not accepted by all. For example, Bauckham resists this, arguing that we must take care to avoid detaching our interpretation from the historical context.[231] His main concern is that the message of Revelation is diluted into either speculation for contemporary application or sociological intrigue.[232] These are valid concerns which are addressed in this interpretation. Viewing Babylon as a transtemporal moniker for the world-city united against God and the empire which it embodies seems to strike the necessary balance. The historical context is respected and the canonical usage of the terminology is upheld with integrity. As such, I will proceed with this approach. Babylon/Rome is kaleidoscopic with various shapes and colours presenting themselves at different times and places.[233] All of these facets are helpfully drawn together and summarised by Caird; "Rome is simply the latest embodiment of something that is a recurrent feature of human history. The great city is the spiritual home of those John dubs inhabitants of the earth; it is the tower of Babel, the city of this world, Vanity Fair."[234]

The reason for judgement

Having established the identity of Babylon/Rome as the most recent embodiment of the transtemporal city, we turn now to consider the second question. Why does Babylon/Rome come under divine judgement? Is it a result of divine displeasure with the city as Ellul argues?[235] Or does it concern the sinful disordering of life, seen primarily in the city, and what it becomes as a result? The texts of Revelation 17:1-18:24 suggest the latter. I have selected four themes from John's vision concerning the judgement of Babylon/Rome which illustrate the reason for divine judgement. We begin by acknowledging the split personality

[231] Bauckham, *Climax*, xii-xiii.
[232] Bauckham, *Climax*, xiii.
[233] Thomas & Macchia, *Revelation*, 204; C.G. González & J.L. González, *Revelation*, (Louisville: WJKP, 1997), 73; Smalley, *Revelation*, 429.
[234] Caird, *Revelation*, 138.
[235] Ellul, *City*, 1.

of the city. Babylon/Rome is both beast-like and promiscuous. Secondly, by using highly charged sexual and hedonistic language John portrays this disordered city as possessing an intoxicating allure. From this, John then shows how the inebriating effect of Babylon/Rome is based on, and leads to, economic injustice similar to her antecedents found in the OT. Finally, we note Babylon/Rome's corrupting influence on the nations. Rather than a place where many peoples flourish in the presence and worship of God (Rev 4:1-5:14; 7:9-17), the peoples of the world are deceived into walking a path doomed to destruction. In all of this we see the mandate and resources of Eden (Gen 1:28; 2:10-11) which were given for the formation of human life and culture have been hijacked under the corruption of sin. Rather than a city where worship of God is central bringing security, prosperity, relationship and community, there has been a tragic inversion culminating in an anti-God urban empire.

Lady wisdom and madam folly?

Before we move on to exploring these themes I want to flag up the use of wisdom traditions in John's thought as it helps affirm the reason for the judgement of Babylon. From the beginning of his letter to the churches, John has warned them about illicit union (Rev 2:1-3:22). Nearing the end of his letter this intensifies and a binary decision is presented based on two distinctive women-cities. As previously stated feminine personification of the city was nothing new.[236] What is striking is the way John contrasts these cities since the believers lived "both geographically and symbolically between Rome and Jerusalem."[237] To aid them John embraces this in his communication, a detail which can be overlooked.

As the climax approaches John employs a didactic method from traditional wisdom teaching to communicate his counsel of caution concerning Babylon's attraction. This can be

[236] Bauckham, *Theology*, 126.
[237] Bauckham, *Theology*, 126.

observed first of all by the way he presents the women antithetically; on different terrain (Rev 17:3; 21:10a), contrasting apparel (Rev 17:4; 21:2) and opposing roles (Rev 17:5-6; 21:9b). It can also be seen in the use of OT allusion throughout the book, suggesting the recipients had a good knowledge of the OT.[238] With this background it is likely that John is drawing on the conceptual juxtaposition of Lady Wisdom and Madam Folly (Prov 8:1-9:18).[239]

Rossing has argued for this and noted that greater appreciation of wisdom traditions are needed to highlight their influence in apocalyptic literature.[240] Her contention is that John makes a deliberate move to accesses a shared ethical framework found in Jewish, pagan and early Christian contexts: the binary choice.[241] Humphrey also shines light on this approach by comparing the second temple text of Joseph and Aseneth with Revelation 17:1-18.[242] It is unlikely that John intended this comparison, something Humphrey readily admits.[243] However, her suggested connection is helpful in showing how the binary choice between repentance and rebellion, framed by female figures, was used in both OT and second temple literature.

Scholarly consensus accepts that Babylon and new Jerusalem have been juxtaposed with intent. Sensitivity to the use of wisdom traditions, however, is not always prominent. Yet it becomes clear that John employs this method to move the churches of Asia Minor to a point of decision. Will they reject the dehumanising evil of the city made in the image of man

[238] G.K. Beale. & Sean M. McDonough, 'Revelation' in G.K. Beale & D.A Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament*, (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 1081-1088.
[239] Caird, *Revelation*, 212.
[240] Barbara R. Rossing., 'City Visions, Feminine Figures and Economic Critique: A Sapiential *Topos* in the Apocalypse' in Benjamin G. Wright III & Lawrence M. Wills. (eds.), *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism*, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 181-196.
[241] Rossing, *Apocalypse*, 181.
[242] Edith M. Humphrey, 'Joseph and Aseneth and Revelation 17:1-1: Women as Archetypes of Rebellion and Repentance' in Ben C. Blackwell, John K. Goodrich & Jason Maston, *Reading Revelation in Context: John's Apocalypse and Second Temple Judaism*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 138-145.
[243] Humphrey, *Aseneth*, 138.

(Babylon/Rome) in preference for living a life of transformed faithfulness for the glory of God (new Jerusalem)?[244]

The sea monster and the serpent

Having established the choice set before the reader we turn to address the first theme: the connection between the beast and the prostitute in Revelation 17. The beast is mentioned numerous times throughout the chapter and I will argue that it is a depiction of the militaristic/political power of Rome which flows from allegiance to the serpent of Eden. How does this connection come about? We are first introduced to the beast in Rev 13 where it rises out of the sea (Rev 13:1). This has parallels in the text of Rev 17 where the prostitute is "seated on many waters" (Rev 17:1) and then "sitting on a scarlet beast" (Rev 17:3). Although the maritime connection may not show any explicit relationship, the description of the beast as one with seven heads and ten horns covered in blasphemous names makes this connection unambiguous (Rev 13:1b; 17:3c).

When Rev 13 is read alongside Job 40:15-41:34 the seedbed of John's thought can be seen.[245] The sea monster is Leviathan. The land monster is Behemoth. However, not all give attention to this connection seeking to locate the primary source of the vision in Dan 7:1-7.[246] Beale notes the importance of Dan 7:1-7 but does not miss the reapplication of Leviathan and Behemoth.[247] Second temple Jewish literature is another reason we cannot overlook this connection. A tradition is recorded involving a cosmic recapitulation with these beasts at the end of time (1 En 60:7-10; 4 Ezra 6:49-52; 2 Bar 29:4). Leviathan and Behemoth are symbolic of evil power, making them the perfect stencil for John to use in depicting Rome's domination of the 1st century Mediterranean world.

[244] Rossing, *Apocalypse*, 181.
[245] Beale, *Revelation*, 682; Caird, *Revelation*, 161; Smalley, *Revelation*, 335.
[246] Mounce, *Revelation*, 244-245.
[247] Beale, *Revelation*, 682.

While eschatological nuances may be intriguing, an assessment of the urban contours will be our concern. Bauckham shows that the two main symbols which refer to Rome in Revelation are the beast representing "the military and political power of the Roman Emperors" and the prostitute which show "all her prosperity gained by economic exploitation of the Empire."[248] This is crucial for reading Rev 17 since the prostitute is riding on the sea monster. Beale adds weight to Bauckham's argument in noting the annual arrival of the Roman proconsul by sea to the port city of Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7).[249] We cannot miss that "the prosperity of the city of Rome at the Empire's expense and her corrupting influence over the Empire rests on the power achieved and maintained by the imperial armies."[250] This detail aids in gaining a deeper understanding of why this city is being judged. Rome has become absolute in the world, the self-proclaimed sovereign without opposition.[251] She leads local officials to a place of religious devotion, unwilling to take on the might of the beast (Rev 13:4b) for fear of political destruction and economic devastation.[252] Rome's ideology of supremacy and prosperity may have looked golden on the outside but it was filled with abominations on the inside (Rev 17:4).

One further step must be taken. John's apocalypse vividly displays that God's design for humanity cannot coexist with that of Satan's Leviathan.[253] Although most spend time relating Rev 13:3 with the *Nero Redivivus* myth[254] I suggest that we are to see that this serpentine alliance (Rev 13:1-3) relates directly to the protoevangelium (Gen 3:15).[255] In Eden the serpent usurps God's design for humanity, which we have argued already included

[248] Bauckham, *Theology*, 35-36; *Climax*, 343-345.
[249] Beale, *Revelation*, 682.
[250] Bauckham, *Theology*, 36.
[251] Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 84.
[252] Bauckham, *Theology*, 36.
[253] Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 84.
[254] For example, Mounce, Revelation, 247-249; Paul, *Revelation*, 231; Smalley, *Revelation*, 338.
[255] See James M. Hamilton Jr. 'The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Gen 3:15' in Paul R. Williamson & Rita F. Cefalu, *The Seed of Promise: The Suffering and Glory of the Messiah, Essays in Honour of T. Desmond Alexander*, (Wilmore: GlossaHouse, 2020), 3-34.

the kernels for developing the urban world and human culture (Gen 1:28; 3:1-7). Here we see this re-appropriation upscaled, cast in the guise of Roman imperial activity (Rev 13:1-10; 17:1-18:24). Making this connection is not without warrant.[256] The wounded head of the sea monster (Rev 13:3a) makes sense of the sentence delivered in Eden (Gen 3:15; cf. *Targ Neof*).[257] Add to this the way Isaiah picks up on this image of Eden:

> "In that day the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea." (Isa 27:1)

Though Hamilton argues for Gen 3:15 to be read alongside Isa 27:1 he does not connect it with Revelation 13:3a.[258] Beale does note the importance of this connection. The stricken serpent originates in Eden, is seen in the militaristic/political power of Rome and will come under the full and final judgement of the Messiah (Rev 1:16; 19:11-16). Framing all of these observations around the images of the city in Revelation 17 we see that the urban world which is founded on abusive military power and coercive political supremacy at the expense of God's purposes and character cannot remain unchecked. As we will now see, this form of urban world is bipolar; a desperate amalgamation of opposing corruptive influences tarnishing God's design laid out in the creation mandate (Gen 1:28).

An intoxicating allure

Sexual and hedonistic language permeate Revelation 17:1-18:24 making these terms important to understand. This second theme displays Rome's deceptive character, and by

[256] Beale, *Revelation*, 687-688.
[257] Michael B. Shepherd., 'Targums, The New Testament And Biblical Theology of the Messiah', *JETS* Vol 51/1, 52-53.
[258] Hamilton, *'Seed'*, 29-30.

extension the deceitfulness of every other transtemporal world-city.[259] I will show how three thematic linguistic groups (sexual, sensual/luxury, drunkenness) unveil this deceit and how these concepts warp the fabric of urban living. Remaining faithful to Christ means being aware of the deceitful character of the great city (Rev 17:18; Rev 2-3).

Commonly envisioned as the goddess Roma, the city of Rome and her empire was thought of in divine terms throughout Asia minor.[260] This deceitful divinity is exposed through John's inversion of this common narrative. Babylon is no goddess; rather τῆς πόρνης τῆς μεάλης (Rev 17:1) selling herself on the world stage.[261] To explore this theme I will build on the outline of Tipvarakankoon who identifies three forms of seductive language in Revelation 17-18 which illuminate the deceitfulness of the prostitute.[262]

Prostitution, fornication and enthronement

First there is sexual language seen in the term πόρνη (whore, prostitute), and related cognates πορνεύω (to commit fornication) and πορνεία (fornication).[263] I will also add the term κάθημαι (to sit, to ride) to the exploration of this theme.[264] On the surface this term does not seem to belong in the same strand of thought. However, in the context of the book of Revelation this term is linked to ideas of sovereignty and power (Rev 4:2, 3, 4, 9, 10; 5:1, 7, 13; 7:10, 15).[265]

[259] Bauckham, *Climax*, 343.
[260] Aune, *Revelation*, 922-923; Bauckham, *Theology*, 126. See also the discussion about *Dea Roma* Stephen D. Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation: Sex and Gender, Empire and Ecology* (Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 125-154. Although I do not agree with Moore's conclusions, there are some helpful insights into the use of *Dea Roma* imagery in the apocalypse.
[261] Fanning, *Revelation*, 436.
[262] Wiriya Tipvarakankoon, *The Theme of Deception in the Book of Revelation: Bringing Early Christian and Contemporary Thai Culture into Dialogue*, (Claremont: Claremont Press, 2017), 195.
[263] BDAG, 693; Tipvarakankoon, *Deception*, 196.
[264] BDAG, 389.
[265] Beale, *Revelation*, 848.

It must be stated clearly that the promiscuous behaviour being described by John is to be taken figuratively, not literally.[266] Sexual language is employed to show the illicit intimate union of the imperial cities and their lovers alluring combination of spiritual idolatry and economic prowess (Rev 1:11; 2-3; cf. 18:3; 11-13). The geographic reach of her favours certainly back up the superlative sense of this prostitutes greatness (Rev 17:2). Furthermore, her licentiousness knows no limit. She has an allure which crosses all social boundaries, something which few commentators pick up on.[267] Kings (Rev 17:2, 18:3, 9) and merchants (Rev 18:3), the influencers of the world are present in her boudoir. But so too are dwellers of the earth (Rev 17:2) and all nations (Rev 18:3). The powerful are only one segment of the prostitutes client base. She has a wide reaching, multi-strata allure which the sexual language captures well.

Taking this further the depiction of the prostitute as "seated on" the many waters/peoples (Rev 17:1, 15), the beast (Rev 17:3) and the mountains (Rev 17:9) invokes pictures of power and dominance. The preposition ἐπί in Revealtion 17:1 could be translated as 'beside'.[268] However, I take it to mean either on or over throughout the text.[269] Aune recognises the importance of the κάθημαι terminology in this passage noting that it is "primarily an indication of enthronement."[270] Beale also comes to this conclusion.[271] However, neither make the step of reading this language in light of the sexually charged atmosphere which surrounds it. I suggest that John is deliberately utilising κάθημαι language in this section to communicate an almost dominatrix-like character residing at the core of the prostitute's idolatrous and economic favours.

[266] Beale, *Revelation*, 848; Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 96; Smalley, *Revelation*, 427.
[267] Paul, *Revelation*, 280; Gonzalez & Gonzalez, *Revelation*, 111.
[268] Mounce, Revelation, 309; Smalley, *Revelation*, 427.
[269] Paul, *Revelation*, 279.
[270] Aune, *Revelation*, 930.
[271] Beale, *Revelation*, 848.

For some, such as Gonzalez and Gonzalez, what is being sat upon, particularly the waters, deserves more attention.[272] This is important and will be handled in a subsequent section concerning the nations. However, who is doing the sitting and the manner of this enthronement should not be overlooked. For others, such as Fiorenza, this image is to be seen in light of the goddess Roma.[273] I believe Fiorenza is partially correct in her assessment. However this needs to be expanded in recognition that this recast prostitute goddess is now a divine dominator selling herself for power.

John is not unique in utilising sexual language as can be seen in the wider canonical context of OT prophecy. We are on good grounds to argue that this corpus is the primary source of John's symbolic reapplication. What must be made clear is that this type of imagery was used in connection with two distinct groups. Firstly, it was employed against God's people who were unfaithful to the covenant (Ezek 16:30-34; Hos 1:1-2).[274] More importantly in the context of Revelation 17-18, OT prophets utilise these images to shine light on the illicit spitritual and economic activities of the nations which seem so appealing to the people of God. Of particular note are the cities of Tyre and Nineveh: [275]

> "In that day Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years, like the days of one king. At the end of seventy years, it will happen to Tyre as in the song of the prostitute: "Take a harp; go about the city, O forgotten prostitute! Make sweet melody; sing many songs, that you may be remembered." At the end of seventy years, the Lord will visit Tyre, and she will return to her wages and will prostitute herself with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth." (Isaiah 23:15-17)

[272] Gonzalez & Gonzalez, *Revelation*, 110.
[273] Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 96.
[274] Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., *Whoredom: God's Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).
[275] Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 96; Tabb, *All Things*, 169-170.

> "And all the countless whorings of the prostitute, graceful and deadly charms, who betray nations with her whorings, and people with her charms. Behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will make nations look at your nakedness and kingdoms at your shame. I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt and make you a spectacle. And all who look at you will shrink from what you say, "Wasted is Nineveh; who will grieve her?" Where shall I seek comforters for you? (Nahum 3:4-7)

Contra Sweet, the sexual language of Revelation 17:2 and 18:3 should not be divided into the distinct categories of idolatry and commerce.[276] Nor should it be viewed purely as a condemnation of spiritual idolatry.[277] Instead, what we see both in the text of Revelation and the wider texts of Scripture are a seductive allure combining spiritual idolatry and commercial injustice. This combination of idolatry and injustice is a reason for God's judgement on this city since it usurps the design laid out in the cultural mandate (Gen 1:28).

Luxury/sensuality

Secondly there is the term στρῆνος (luxury, sensuality)[278] in Revelation 18 which is the only appearance of this word grouping in the NT.[279] There are three uses of this term, yet Tipvarakankoon draws attention to only one instance (Rev 18:3).[280] That being said, I agree with Tipvarakankoon's argument that through deliberate use of a term which has a sliding lexical range, the reader is forced to engage with a play on words that unify the sexual and

[276] John Sweet, *Revelation*, (London: SCM, 1979), 253.
[277] Fanning, *Revelation*, 436.
[278] BDAG, 771; Tipvarakankoon, *Deception*, 196.
[279] Paul, *Revelation*, 292; Smalley, *Revelation*, 445.
[280] Tipvarakankoon, *Deception*, 199-202.

economic metaphors of Rome's allure.[281] We should also note that this sort of wordplay is another feature common to traditional wisdom teaching furthering the proposal of Rossing.[282]

Although I agree with Tipvarakankoon I would go a step further and argue that this is the key piece of language to understand in order to get behind the intoxicating allure of the prostitute. Where sexual immorality and intoxication are activities requiring physical action, metaphorically speaking, sensuality and luxury engage the unseen dimensions of human experience. The mind, the heart and the soul can actively engage in these deceptions in ways which may not seem at odds with faithfulness to Christ. Yet this is where John's unification of these concepts, sensuality and luxury, helps to destabilize and unveil the true character of the harlot city and how the churches can easily participate in her seductive deception (Rev 2-3).[283]

As before, warning God's people in this way is not new. When Revelation 18 is read alongside Ezekiel 26-28 it is clear that John is "echoing and reapplying the oracles of his predecessors."[284] We can see this when looking at the στρηνος terminology. Although possible to read του στρήνους in Revelation 18:3 as a descriptive genitive (luxurious power), the genitive of source[285] is to be preferred (power arising from luxury).[286] Not only does this make sense of the context, it also takes into account the use of Ezekiel 26-28 as source material for this chapter.[287] Revelation 18:3 can be paralleled alongside Ezekiel 27:12 (cf. Ezek 27:33) and seen as the first in a long line of allusions and references to the judgement against Tyre.[288] Adding all of this up we see that the prostitute's powerful allure comes from her flaunting the intoxicating combination of luxury and sensuality. This is a disturbing

[281] Tipvarakankoon, *Deception*, 199-202.
[282] Rossing, *Apocalypse*, 181.
[283] Ezek 8:7-13 is a good example of this sort of deception among the people of God.
[284] Bauckham, *Climax*, 345.
[285] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 109-110.
[286] Beale, *Revelation*, 895-896; Smalley, *Revelation*, 445.
[287] Bauckham, *Climax*, 345.
[288] Bauckham, *Climax*, 345; Beale, *Revelation*, 896; Beale & McDonough, *Revelation*, 1140.

picture which can easily shape the mind of any city. How we engage our minds in the urban context matters as is harrowingly portrayed by the destruction of Rome. Self-deception lays the seedbed of the city's own destructions (Rev 17:16-17).[289]

Drunkenness

The third form of language highlighted by Tipvarakankoon relates to drunkenness: μεθύσκω (to get drunk; Rev 17:2),[290] πίνω (to drink; Rev 18:3)[291] and οἶνου (wine; Rev 17:2; 18:3, cf. 18:13).[292] However, there is an oversight since Revelation 17:6 uses the verb μεθύσκω to describe the prostitute "drunk with the blood of the saints, the martyrs of Jesus." I will also include this in the following assessment.

Prophetic literature in the OT often employs drunkenness as a metaphor for God's wrath against the idolatry of his people (Isa 51:17) and the nations (Jer 25:15-29; 51:7; Lam 4:21).[293] It depicts God making the nations drink the wine of his wrath because of their immorality (Jer 25:15-29). Of greater importance to this study is the direct correlation between Revelation 17:2 & 18:3 (cf. Rev 17:4b) with Jer 51:7:

> "Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord's hand, making all the earth drunken; the nations drank of her wine; therefore the nations went mad."

It is surprising that Beale and McDonough do not make reference to this parallel in their commentary as the similarity is striking.[294] Rossing does draw this connection concluding that images of sexual immorality and intoxication are innovatively combined by

[289] Aune, *Revelation*, 935; Paul, *Revelation*, 281.
[290] BDAG 499.
[291] BDAG 658.
[292] BDAG 562; Tipvarakankoon, *Deception*, 202-206.
[293] Tipvarakankoon, *Deception*, 202-203.
[294] Beale & McDonough, *Revelation*, 1137.

John to add "an element of seduction and trafficking" to the city.[295] The use of the verb μεθύσκω (Rev 17:2) presented in passive form ("*have been made drunk"*) suggests a toxic power dynamic at play.[296] Furthermore, the elite and the peoples of the world are set in contrast by John. On the one hand we see the rulers described by a sexual union to the prostitute. On the other, the peoples of the world are viewed as drunk through exploitation. Rossing and Tipvarakankoon are not alone in articulating this position. Bauckham concludes that Rome, and the officials who are in bed with her, live well at the expense of the local people of the imperial cities.[297] Roman rule has a maddening effect on every strata of society.[298] John uses these images to reveal the reality of a coercive ruling elite selling off those under their protection and authority for economic advancement and spiritual idolatry.

The cup in the prostitute's hand (Rev 17:4) is a caustic cocktail flavoured with a disgusting demonic disposition to kill Christ followers (Rev 17:6).[299] Images of blood and wine have already appeared in the text in connection to God's judgement of the ungodly (Rev 14:20; 16:6). However, in Revelation 17:6 we see that this motif has shifted in meaning.[300] It is this shift which explains the previous use of the images concerning God's judgement. The seductive prostitute is guilty of murdering her opponents and has a particular interest in Christ followers.[301] We see this expanded as the judgement against Babylon reaches its climax where "the blood of prophets and of saints" (Rev 18:24a) is given as a key reason for her impending destruction. Through use of μεθύσκω language in Revelation 17:6 John shows

[295] Barbara Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities*: *Whore, Bride and Empire in the Apocalypse*, Harvard Theological Studies 48, (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), 65.
[296] Tipvarakankoon, *Deception*, 204.
[297] Bauckham, *Revelation*, 369-370.
[298] Paul, *Revelation*, 280; Beale, *Revelation*, 849; Gonzalez & Gonzalez, *Revelation*, 111.
[299] Smalley, *Revelation*, 432.
[300] Aune, *Revelation*, 938.
[301] Aune, *Revelation*, 938.

that Babylon takes pleasure in the death of Christ followers in a way which is similar to how her clients take pleasure from her favours.[302]

However, there is disagreement about this persecution. Sweet asserts that this is a direct reference to the Neronian persecution.[303] No doubt this was part of the consciousness of the Christian community but it does not seem to be the only dynamic at play. Mounce argues that this is most likely an eschatological event which is still to come.[304] Given the nature of Revelation's reflexivity this dimension is plausibly in view, but it must be tempered with application to the lives of the 1st century recipients. After all "the actual or threatened death of people because of their faithfulness to Christ is mentioned repeatedly in Revelation."[305] Hendricksen suggests that recognising Rome as "a pleasure mad city" opens a way into interpreting the persecution which is being spoken of.[306] He argues that Christians are seen as sport since "the saints were torn to pieces in its circuses for the amusement and entertainment of the public."[307] Finally, Beale suggests that the economic system of Rome is in view and the persecution which is faced by believers in this instance would be a multi-faceted attack on all fronts of life.[308] In reality each of these opinions hold a degree of validity given the trans-temporal nature of Babylon/Rome. Even so, a combination of Hendricksen and Beale seems to strike the right balance with relation to the city drunk on the blood of the saints.

By combining these terms John displays the intoxicating allure of the imperial capital. Babylon is a sexually promiscuous dominator, promising power and wealth to her clients if only they would sleep with her. Through a veil of sensuality and luxury many people allow

[302] Beale, *Revelation*, 860; Smalley, *Revelation*, 432.
[303] Sweet, *Revelation*, 255.
[304] Mounce, *Revelation*, 312.
[305] Fanning, *Revelation*, 441.
[306] Hendricksen, *Conquerors*, 168.
[307] Hendricksen, *Conquerors*, 168.
[308] Beale, *Revelation*, 860.

their hearts and minds to be enticed by the siren's song. Peoples from all backgrounds become intoxicated, not realising that the great prostitute is herself mad on the wine of her own immorality. Each of these terms combine to produce a horrible and harrowing portrait of a seemingly powerful and luxurious woman who in reality is a disfigured deceiver like the one she follows. To make this point clear Thomas and Macchia note the sad irony: "the great whore has become intoxicated and unable to function in a clear headed fashion, having consumed the very witness that could have led to her salvation!"[309]

Economic injustice

Having focused primarily on Revelation 17 attention is now given to the theme of economic injustice found in Revelation 18. John does not develop this critique on his own. By means of divine revelation through the angelic messenger (Rev 18:1, 4, 21) and the intricate reapplication of OT prophetic literature, John speaks from the underbelly of the city. Economic injustice is given as a central rationale for God's judgement of the city furthering my contention that the concept of city is not coming under judgement in the book of Revelation. Instead the motif of city is being employed to represent the anti-God activity of humanity. Due to the constraints of this research I will focus on the relationship between the oracles against Tyre (Ezek 27:12-24) and Rome (Rev 18:11-13). Following this I will show that God's invitation in light of this economic injustice is to repentance through lament. This I argue is the attitude which John sought to reinvigorate within the church as it retained witness to the risen Christ in the cities of Asia.

John's critique of Rome in Revelation 18 operates within an exquisite framework following the pattern of a triptych within a triptych.[310] The main section of lament (Rev 18:9-

[309] Thomas & Macchia, *Revelation*, 296.
[310] Sweet, *Revelation*, 264. See also Beale, *Revelation*, 891; Fiorenza, Revelation, 98-99. Beale does not use the language of triptych but does see the same structure.

19) is flanked with two announcements of judgement (Rev 18:1-8, 20-24). Within the macrostructure a further triptych is identifiable which arranges the laments of the kings (Rev 18:9-10) and the sea captains (Rev 18:17b-19) around the central lament of the merchants (Rev 18:11-17a). Through methodical placement John pinpoints the root issue: economic injustice seen in the list of cargoes being traded throughout the empire (Rev 18:12-13). These goods signifying economic prosperity also serve to highlight "the principal idolatry of Rome was not so much the adulation of the emperor as the adulation of the wealth and prosperity that come from international trade and the consumption which drives it."[311] This is something which we will return to.

Of particular importance to this research are the texts of Ezekiel 26-27 which Tabb argues are like a blueprint for the judgement which is falling on Babylon in Revelation 18.[312] He lists 15 points of textual correlation which help illuminate the connection John is making.[313] Substantiating this connection Bauckham argues "If Rome was the heir of Babylon in political and religious activity, she was also the heir of Tyre in economic activity."[314] Bauckham proceeds to provide analysis of Revelation 18:12-13 in light of Ezekiel 27:12-24 in a way that Tabb does not.[315] Since the structure of the chapter leads to Revelation 18:12-13 as the centrepiece, and given the contents of this text, it seems that imperial economic activity is the primary focus of judgement.

However, not everyone agrees with this interpretation. In particular, Provan finds great difficulty in seeing Revelation 18:12-13 as a critique of Roman economics.[316] He argues that John does not start from a blank canvas. As an OT scholar Provan notes how

[311] Paul, *Revelation*, 290. See also, Christopher R. Smith, 'Reclaiming the Social Justice Message of Revelation: Materialism, Imperialism and Divine Judgement in Revelation 18', *Transformation*, Vol 7:4 1990, 28-29.
[312] Tabb, *All Things*, 171-172.
[313] Tabb, *All Things*, 172.
[314] Bauckham, *Climax*, 346. This also seems to back up the use of the cipher as a referent to a transtemporal city.
[315] Bauckham, *Climax*, 350-371.
[316] Iain Provan, "Foul Spirits, Fornication and Finance: Revelation 18 From an Old Testament Perspective", *JSNT* 64 (1996), 81-100.

prominently John's writing is influenced by the OT canon, particularly Ezekiel 27:12-14.[317] This is something which Provan and Bauckham agree on.[318] Provan's main objection comes on account of Bauckham's historical-critical method.[319] He argues that this sort of reading limits universal applications of the text, constraining it to the particulars.[320] I adopt a position between Bauckham and Provan. I agree with Bauckham that this passage finds roots in the Roman world of the 1st century and acts as a skilful critique of that world.[321] Even so, I agree with Provan's concern about over particularisation and his desire to recognise the eternal power struggle between God and those who oppose his kingdom across the canon.[322] I also remain convinced about the importance of Revelation 18:12-13 as the hinge of this passage. As such I will highlight the economic critique of Rome and advocate a transtemporal application.

Turning to the text of Revelation 18:12-13 I do not propose going through each of the twenty-eight items listed on John's manifest.[323] Instead, I intend to show that excess and lavishness breeds a society of injustice culminating in dehumanisation. For this reason the manifest is not to be seen as symbolic.[324] As Smith argues, this would be far too lenient on Rome, avoiding the graphic reality of the injustice which is being revealed.[325] Adopting a literal reading allows for the source of the goods to be identified, rooting Rome's exploitation in reality. For example, origins have been identified "as including Spain, Egypt and North

[317] On this point I agree with Provan. John is deeply influenced by the OT. Although some argue for the existence of a special Jewish source for John's vision at this point, reading the chapter in light of the OT sheds the necessary light for interpretation. See discussion of this in Mounce, *Revelation*, 322-323. Although similarities can be seen with the oracles against Jerusalem (Jer 16:17-18, 17:17-18) and Nineveh (Nah 3), as well as second temple literature (*1 Enoch* 94:6-100:6), the great oracles against Babylon (Jer 50-51) and Tyre (Ezek 26-28) operate as John's main sources.
[318] Bauckham, *Climax*, 345.
[319] Provan, "Finance", 99.
[320] Provan, "Finance", 99.
[321] Bauckham, *Climax*, 351.
[322] Provan, "Finance", 99-100.
[323] If one wishes to do this see Bauckham, *Climax*, 350-371 for a comprehensive analysis of the cargo.
[324] Smith, "Reclaiming", 29.
[325] Smith, "Reclaiming", 29. It would also be too lenient on the 21st C inheritors of Rome's transtemporal nature.

Africa, Syria, the Persian Gulf, India, Ceylon, Indonesia and China."[326] The origin of the cargoes evokes a sense of awe at the geographical reach of the great prostitute's appetite and appeal. A good example is Rome's relationship with China facilitated by the Silk Road as documented in the annals of the Han Dynasty (A.D. 25-220).[327]

An important side question arises from this observation and was flagged up previously. Is God judging international trade and commerce? At a glance, the oracles against Tyre (Ezek 27:12-24) and Rome (Rev 18:1-24) seem to point in this direction. Commentators such as Paul also propose that what is being judged is "the wealth and prosperity that come from international trade and the consumption which drives it."[328] It cannot be denied that only a small percentage of the Roman empire's elite enjoyed the benefits of this trade.[329] However, I struggle to see how global trade is the subject of judgement. In a similar way to the city, trade is warped and for this reason I partially agree with Paul's argument. I disagree with his comment concerning trade, but I affirm that the insatiable attitude of consumption which drives this trade is coming under judgement. Much like cities, trading activity can also be traced from the cultural mandate of Eden (Gen 1:28; cf. Rev 21:24-26). Therefore, it seems that God is judging the economic injustice of humanity, as seen in Rome, and all other transtemporal cities, not necessarily the practice of global trade. When done well global trade should demonstrate the security, prosperity, relationship and community which the creation mandate suggests (Gen 1:28).

This leads naturally to exploring how this industry became the nexus of disparity and destruction in the Roman world. Although Provan disagrees with this reading of Revelation 18:12-13,[330] there is a general consensus that these goods be read as the trappings of the elite

[326] Smith, *Foundations*, 210.
[327] Aune, *Revelation*, 999. See also M.P. Charlesworth, *Trade Routes and Commerce of the Roman Empire,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924; 2016), 97-111.
[328] Paul, *Revelation*, 290. See also, Smith, "Reclaiming", 28-29.
[329] Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 100.
[330] Provan, "Finance", 85-86.

in Roman society.[331] So how do these goods highlight injustice? I will examine this from two angles relating firstly to the cultural mandate (Gen 1:28) and secondly to the *Imago Dei* (Gen 1:26-27). First of all, these goods were extracted from nature to satiate excess, not to meet need. The "costly wood" (Rev 18:12b) was sourced from North Africa for its beautiful markings to manufacture tables.[332] Only a few of the sections from the base of the felled tree would be harvested and the remainder left to rot.[333] Smith has even suggested that this led to the depletion of citrus wood forests in the region.[334] Another example is the use of purple dye taken from the Murex shellfish (Rev 18:12a).[335] Purple clothing became a status symbol in the ancient world among the elite.[336] To meet the demand vast quantities had to be fished since only one vein of blood produced the deep purple colour.[337] Finally, with such great demand for ivory (Rev 18:12b) the Syrian elephant paid the cost of excessive consumption.[338] Here are three examples of the economic incentive to waste, not to live harmoniously with creation. As a concept, the city did not create this injustice, but it did provide fertile ground for humanity's sinful, excessive compulsions to flourish in a direction contrary to the creation mandate (Gen 1:28).

There is a final detail which emphasises Rome's economic injustice. In 18:13c we read καὶ σωμάτων, καὶ ψυχὰς ἀντηρώπων (and bodies, which are human beings AT).[339] The term σωμάτων was a common expression used of enslaved people in the 1st century.[340] However, debate surrounds this rendering of the text. Does John have one or two groups in

[331] Bauckham, *Climax*, 351-352; Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 100-101; González & González, *Revelation*, 120-121; Smith, "Reclaiming", 30.
[332] Mounce, *Revelation*, 333.
[333] Smith, "Reclaiming", 30.
[334] Smith, *Liberating*, 134.
[335] Mounce, *Revelation*, 333.
[336] Bauckham, *Climax*, 354.
[337] Smith, "Reclaiming", 30.
[338] Paul, *Revelation*, 296; Smith, *Liberating*, 134.
[339] I take the και epexegetically. See Bauckham, *Climax*, 370.
[340] BDAG 799; Fanning, *Revelation*, 464.

view?[341] I take the final και epexegetically, adding description to the enslaved people in focus.[342] My reason for this is rooted in the point I believe John is seeking to highlight concerning God's judgement against Rome and her empire. First, John uses this phrase as his climax. He could have chosen to follow the pattern of his source material by mentioning slaves at the beginning of his manifest (Ezek 27:13) but he does not. Instead, he strategically places these people at the end.[343] Why does he do this? I argue that he is placing before the churches a value fulcrum. For Rome, humans were more than acceptable commodities to be bought and sold. But from the divine, and canonical perspective, they are image bearers (Gen 1:26-27; 2:7) who are inherently valuable; reflections of God's glory, not cattle for the marketplace.[344]

Through deliberate placement John makes his point with maximum impact intending to set the record straight.[345] For every woman who wanted to bathe in a silver bathtub or general who desired to dine from lavish dishes, multiple human beings would be exploited.[346] This is more than a statement against the slave trade common to Rome. It is a comment on "the inhuman brutality, the contempt for human life, on which the whole of Rome's prosperity and luxury rests."[347] The trade of the city and her empire unveil a harrowing reality. When lavishness and excess are prized above the good of creation and the inherent dignity of human life, the city, and her empire, have sown the seeds of their own destruction.

Influence on the nations

The final theme to be explored concerns Rome's influence on the nations. In the context of Revelation 17-18 the nations are presented as those in league with Rome (Rev

[341] Mounce, *Revelation*, 334; Smalley, *Revelation*, 456.
[342] Bauckham, *Climax*, 370.
[343] Smith, *Liberating*, 135.
[344] Smith, *Liberating*, 135.
[345] Smith, *Liberating*, 135; Fanning, *Revelation*, 464.
[346] Mounce, *Revelation*, 333.
[347] Bauckham, *Climax*, 371.

17:1, 15-18; 18:3, 9a, 23b). However, as Herms shows, a wider reading of the book presents a broader understanding. The nations can be seen through a positive, neutral or negative lens.[348] Early on in Revelation the throne room of heaven is presented and we hear a fourfold formula declaring a global community belonging to Christ (Rev 5:9-10). However, this is not the reality presented in Revelation 17-18 where the nations live under the sway of Rome (Rev 17:1, 15) and are drunk on her illicit propositions (Rev 18:3). I want to show that the influence which Rome exerts over the nations is presented as a climactic reason for judgement of the city.

I will highlight two phrases in the texts related to the nations which are purposefully combined to show the negative influence of the city. The first phrase, "on many waters" (Rev 17:1), highlights the striking parallel between Rome and her predecessor (Gen 11:1-9; Jer 51:13) with both sharing the same end (Rev 17:16-18; 18:2-3, 21-24). Secondly, I will refer to the phrase "peoples and multitudes and nations and languages" in the "new song" of Revelation 5:9. It relates directly to Revelation 17:15 and Ps. 96, and when read in conjunction they anticipate the destruction of Rome and all other cities which embody this sort of influence over the nations.

The first phrase, "on many waters" (Rev 17:1) is explained by angelic interpretation (Rev 17:15). Although water imagery is used by the prophets at various times (Isa 8:7; 17:12-13; 23:11; Jer 46: 8; 47:2) John is making a deliberate allusion to Jer 51:13;[349]

> "O you who dwell by many waters, rich in treasures your end has come; the thread of your life is cut."

[348] For a detailed study of "the nations" and surrounding concepts in Revelation see Ronald Herms, *An Apocalypse for the Church and the World*, (Walter de Gruyter: Berlin, 2006), 172-256.

[349] Beale & McDonough, *Revelation*, 1137.

Like Babylon, Rome also flourished economically and gained security through the water which surrounded her.[350] If full and final judgement was the fate of Babylon the texts of Revelation show that Rome's end is the same (Rev 17:16-18; 18:2-3, 21-24). Some seek to draw parallels between this imagery and ANE creation myths, Gen 1:6-8 and the primordial chaos.[351] An element of this may be present given the links with the sea monster discussed earlier (Rev 13:1-3) and the developing tumult among the nations as Paul suggests (Rev 17:16-17).[352] Kistemaker also makes this connection referring to "the restless waves of humanity".[353] However, he argues that water language should "not be read literally but spiritually"[354] so as to allow for wider application of the vision.[355] Yet Kraybill contends this vision of the waters stands as an indictment on the provincial rulers of Rome's empire.[356] So, too, Gonzalez & Gonzalez who say that the fourfold phrase are "allies of Rome."[357]

While I agree with Kistemaker that there is a broader horizon for application, this imagery and allusion have clear connections to Rome in the 1st century world. The many waters stand for the masses of the world swayed by anti-Christian forces[358] which in the 1st century would have been Rome and the empire under her influence.[359] Holding this position makes sense of how the maritime imagery is developed later in the flow of the narrative (Rev 18:17b-20). Rome rules the waters both literally and figuratively with trading channels not only permitting the exchange of goods and the economic injustice. They provided fertile ground for control and domination leading the peoples of the world into false worship.[360]

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[350] Beale, *Revelation*, 882; Justo L. Gonzalez, *For the Healing of the Nations*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 76.
[351] Gonzalez, *Healing*, 77; Paul, *Revelation*, 288.
[352] Paul, *Revelation*, 288
[353] Simon J. Kistemaker, *Revelation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 462.
[354] Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 462.
[355] Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 477.
[356] Kraybill, *Apocalypse*, 129.
[357] Gonzalez & Gonzalez, *Revelation*, 114.
[358] Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 477.
[359] Ladd, *Revelation*, 232.
[360] Ladd, *Revelation*, 222.

The second phrase "peoples and multitudes and nations and languages" (Rev 17:15b) is the angelic interpretation of the first phrase I have identified. It draws upon language from the book of Daniel where similar phrasing is found (Dan 3:4, 7; 4:1 5:19; 6:25). In Daniel, this statement is made with reference to peoples living under the rule of Babylon. One final occurrence of this phrase is found in Daniel with connection to the Son of Man (Dan 7:14). Across Revelation variants of this same phrase are employed seven times (Rev 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15) with the final use occurring in this text.[361] By contrasting the first use of this phrase with its final use in Revelation, an important point emerges. Rome's destruction comes as a result of influencing the nations into false worship (cf. Gen 1:26, 28; 2:15; 3:1-7).

In Revelation 5:9 we encounter the slain lamb who has died for the salvation of his people throughout the world adding depth to the vision of Dan 7:14:

> "And they sang a new song, saying, '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 to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.'" (Rev 5:9-10; italics added)

However in Revelation 17:15, the final use of this formula, the lamb who was slain has been seemingly usurped by the city and her empire:

[361] For an in depth discussion of the fourfold formula of the nations see Bauckham, *Climax*, 326-337.

> "Come I will show you the judgement of the great prostitute who is seated on *many waters… the waters* that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, *are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages*." (Rev 17:1, 15; italics added)

John's angelic guide makes clear that what can be seen in the present is neither the reason for human existence nor the cosmic reality. The city is key in influencing the peoples of the world away from worship of the lamb (Rev 17:14a). But Rome's influence on the nations will ultimately be her undoing (Rev 17:16-17). A purely spiritualised reading of this demise is to be rejected since it devalues the horrors which have already been explored in previous sections. Instead we are to see "John's vision [as] a paradigm of how empires typically collapse…when an empire weakens and can no longer deliver the wealth or prestige to its henchmen, puppet rulers turn against the very power they once championed."[362]

A final exegetical step will be taken to show the climatic reason for God's judgement. We see that both the first and final use of the fourfold formula occur in contexts within Revelation which communicate the certainty of divine judgement and salvation. This is more clear to see in Revelation 17:15 where the nations are pictured as rebelling against Rome under the guidance of God (Rev 17:17a).[363] It is perhaps more challenging to see how this connects with Revelation 5:9-10. Longman and Reid discuss how the language of the "new song" found in Revelation 5:9 is shorthand for YHWH's victory song.[364] Ps 96 is a good example, acting as a typological frame for God's actions towards the city in Revelation:

[362] J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics and Devotion in the Book of Revelation*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 130.
[363] Kraybill, *Apocalypse* 129.
[364] Tremper Longman III & Daniel G. Reid, *God is a Warrior: Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 44-45.

> "Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous works among all the peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods…say among the nations "The Lord reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity"…He will judge the nations in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness." (Ps 96:1-4, 10, 13b)

The newness of the song in the Ps. 96 and in Revelation 5:9 is not simply its place in space and time.[365] So what is it? For Smalley the newness is twofold in the context of Revelation; Christ's new covenant and a precursor to the new creation.[366] This fits well with Grant's assessment of Ps. 96 although he does not make connection between Ps. 96 and Revelation 5:9.[367] Added to this, the "new song" of Revelation 5:9 read in light of the OT canon communicates God's decisive judgement and victory over all that is unified against him.[368] False worship propagated among the nations must be judged, for God is to be glorified among all that he has made. The use of the fourfold phrase in Revelation 5:10 furthers this position as it communicates the universality of God's purposes for the nations.[369] Just as Ps. 96 calls the for the declaration of God's glory among the nations, so too does Revelation 5:9-10.

When this first use of the fourfold phrase is read alongside its final use in Revelation 17:15 we see that God's glory is displayed through his decisive action against the false worship fashioned by Rome. As with each of the previous sections what becomes clear is the

[365] Smalley, *Revelation*, 136.
[366] Smalley, *Revelation*, 136.
[367] W. Dennis Tucker & Jamie A. Grant, *Psalms Vol.2*, (NIVAC), (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 414.
[368] Beale and McDonough, *Revelation*, 1102.
[369] Bauckham, *Climax*, 326; Mounce, *Revelation*, 136.

problem of humanity, not the inherently evil nature of the city. Rome's deceptive influence on the nations must be judged and as such stands at the heart of her coming destruction. It is important to recognise that this judgement against the inhabitants of Rome and her client kingdoms is not vindictive. If anything it is an act which displays the goodness of God's character. Humanity's alliance with the serpent has led to the creation of structures which perpetuate oppression and injustice as seen above. God cannot allow this to carry on forever.

One final detail which will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter concerns the juxtaposition of the nations under the rule of Rome, united against God's purposes and the nations included in new Jerusalem. John has structured the apocalypse in such a way to show the importance of the nations to the churches (Rev 17:15-18; 18:23b-24; 21:24-25; 22:2). Living among "the nations" these churches were in places of strategic importance to announce the victory of the slain lamb and invite those who are represented under the banner of the fourfold phrase to meet him. But they were also in positions of great challenge where compromise with Rome's ideology was palpable. It is no surprise that John and his hearers needed to receive a word of instruction from outside of themselves and their place in time and space; "Come out of her my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues" (Rev 18:4b).

Chapter 5: The coming of New Jerusalem

Observations in the previous chapter show that the city is not an inherently evil place. Rather, judgement of Babylon/Rome centres on humanity's rejection of God and his purposes. When this happens the foundational statement of human value is forgotten (Gen 1:26) and the mandate of human purpose is lost (Gen 1:28). In such a context John presents a warning for the churches to remain faithful, not an appeal to reject the cities in which they lived (Rev 18:4).

What Revelation 17:1-18:24 does not answer is the role of the city in God's eschatological purposes. To address this we turn to Revelation 21:1-22:5 where John is shown a vision of what is to come, and that vision is urban (Rev 21:1, 9). How are we to understand this vision? More specifically, is it the description of a physical city? Or is it a reference to God's presence with his people in a renewed eschatological age? I will argue that the city motif in this section amalgamates three crucial details. It is the people of God, in the presence of God in the place God provides. I will consider each of these elements in this chapter. Before doing so, there is an underlying question which needs to be addressed. Does Revelation speak about the renewal of creation or its replacement (Rev 21:5)? The answer to this question impacts the interpretation of this section since the language of newness is bound up with the city to come (Rev 21:2).

New or renewed?

What is meant by the newness described in this section (Rev 21:1-2, 5)?[370] Are we to understand the newness of the heavens, earth and Jerusalem as the dissolution of the current creation and its replacement with a literal new creation? Or are we to understand the language

[370] See, Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 4: Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 715-730.

of newness as an expression that the present creation will be renewed by God? While these options cannot be explored in depth, it would be unwise to proceed without acknowledgement of this tension. I will sketch out both perspectives arguing that the language of newness describes a form of renewal to take place in the present creation rather than its destruction and replacement.

Texts hinting at cosmic disruption or destruction can be found in both canonical (e.g. Gen 7:6-24; 8:22; Ps 46: 2-3; Isa 13:9-13; 34; Hag 2:6; Matt 24:35; Mk 13:31; Lk 21:33; 2 Pet 3:1-13; Rev 21:1-2) and second temple literature (e.g. *1 Enoch* 1:6-9; 45:4-5; *2 Esdr* 6:20).[371] Wright suggests that neither Jewish nor early Christian communities anticipated or expected the end of the world.[372] While I partially agree with Wright's statement given the complexity and nuance required when handling apocalyptic literature, Revelation 21:1-2 and 2 Peter 3:1-13 suggest that some form of "end of the world" discussions were taking place.[373] The question we face is this; what is the *endzeit* as viewed in the book of Revelation?

2 Peter 3:1-13 is an important text to consider in answering this question. Peter's language does not paint the prospects of the present creation in a positive light.[374] By extension this also has implications for the city. Is the urban world to be consumed by divine conflagration? If so, does it affirm the city's anomalous presence? Though Moo does not agree, he notes a scholarly assumption that 2 Peter 3 portrays "the complete dissolution of the present cosmos and its replacement".[375] For example, MacArthur argues that "Peter foresaw the disintegration of the entire universe in an instant 'un-creation', not by any naturalistic scenario, but solely by God's omnipotent intervention."[376] Along similar lines Aune states

[371] For a helpful overview of this subject see Williamson, 'Destruction' 125-145.
[372] N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (London: SPCK, 1996), 321.
[373] Alex-Greats Worlanyo, "The Destiny of the Earth: An Ecological Reading of 2 Peter 3:1-13", (PhD diss., University of Ghana, 2018).
[374] Gale Z. Heide, 'What is New About the New Heaven and The New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3', *JETS* (40:1), (1997), 37-56.
[375] Moo, "Hope", 154.
[376] John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude: MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody, 2005), 124-125.

that "the author has in view the *complete destruction* of the physical universe".[377] In greater detail Walvoord presents a similar case;

> "In view of the tremendous energy locked into every material atom, the same God who locked in this energy can unlock it and destroy it, reducing it to nothing. . . . Since the power of God that locked in atomic power can also un-lock it, it is possible that the destruction of the physical earth and heaven will be a gigantic explosion in which all goes back to nothing. Out of this God could create a new heaven and new earth as a base for eternity. In any case, the new earth will be totally different from the old earth."[378]

Commenting on Revelation 21:1 Walvoord argues for replacement rather than renewal going so far as to suggest a new creation *ex nihilo*.[379] Osborne also favours a destructionist interpretation arguing that Revelation 21:1 suggests "the destruction of the old order and a brand 'new heaven and new earth.'"[380] While I would affirm both the high view of God's sovereignty and Scripture held by those of a destructionist interpretation, I am not convinced by either their direction of travel or point of terminus on this matter. Neither the texts of 2 Pet 3 or Revelation 21, nor even the wider biblical narrative, demand this interpretation.

If anything, the activity of God seems to support the renewal of creation rather than its destruction and replacement.[381] First, we see creational renewal in John's allusion to Isa 65:17-25 (cf. Isa 11:1-12:6; 43:18-21; 66:22; Rev 21:1). Though Aune suggests that

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[377] Aune, *Revelation*, 1117 (Italics original).
[378] John F. Walvoord, *Major Biblical Prophecies: 37 Crucial Prophecies which Affect Your Today*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 414.
[379] John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 311.
[380] Osborne, *Revelation*, 730.
[381] See Bavinck, *Dogmatics Vol. 4*, 716-718.

Revelation 21:1 is a derivative of Isaiah the text demands more attention.[382] John states that he is receiving a vision (και είδον), and this vision fleshes out the promise spoken to Isaiah.[383] In the text of Isaiah the new heavens and earth (Isa 65:17a) are juxtaposed against the "former things" (Isa 65:17b). Motyer shows that two distinct layers are encompassed in this passage: return from Babylonian exile and a future reality where the old order will be no more, in light of God's great renewal.[384] Isaiah is speaking of a qualitative change in existence encompassing every dimension of life[385] in which "God will be creating a reality where all is as it should be; distress and turmoil will be no more."[386] In a way similar to Israel's restoration after Babylon, God's people, the city and the entire cosmos will undergo restoration and renewal in a truly 'post Babylonian' age (Rev 17-18; 21:4).

A second reason to prefer renewal is found in Jewish apocalyptic literature and the wider NT (*1 Enoch* 45:4-5; 72:1-2; 91:16; *4 Ezra* 7:75; *Apoc. Elijah* 5:38; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; 2 Pet 3:13). For example;

> "And I will transform the heaven and make it an eternal blessing and light and I will transform the earth and make it a blessing." (*1 Enoch* 45:4b-5a)

> "And the first heaven shall depart and pass away, and a new heaven shall appear, and all the powers of the heavens shall give sevenfold light." (*1 Enoch* 91:16)[387]

[382] Aune, *Revelation,* 1116.
[383] Smalley, *Revelation,* 523.
[384] Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah,* (Leicester: IVP, 1993), 529.
[385] Paul R. House, *Isaiah Volume 2: Chapters 28-66,* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2019), 707-712. See also Smalley, *Revelation*, 524.
[386] Andrew T. Abernethy, *God's Kingdom and the Book of Isaiah: A Thematic Theological Approach,* NSBT Vol 40., (London: Apollos, 2016), 174.
[387] Osborne reads this as a text speaking of destruction and recreation, rather than renewal. However, as with Rev 21:1 the text does not demand this reading. Osborne, *Revelation*, 730.

These texts illuminate discussions which were taking place at the time leading back to 2 Peter 3:1-13. Does this text only make sense from a destructionist perspective? Wolters disagrees arguing that there are three "worlds" in view; pre-Flood (2 Pet 3:6), post-flood (2 Pet 3:7) and a future world after judgement (2 Pet 3:13).[388] He suggests that "[j]ust as the second world is the first one washed clean by water, so the third world will be the second one even more radically purged by fire."[389] Moo notes that the fire judgement is "primarily to lay the earth bare before God, to reveal it as it is and to leave human beings and their works without any place to hide."[390] Allusions to the Day of the Lord in Malachi also feature in 2 Peter 3 (Mal 3:2-3, 4:1) and this judgement is one of cleansing and renewal, not destruction.[391]

If anything 2 Peter 3:1-13 affirms the argument I have been making throughout: God's judgement is against sinful humanity (2 Pet 3:6-7).[392] Peter's allusion to the Noahic flood (Gen 6-7) adds a second strand to this argument. Although he uses strong language about the coming judgement, he has employed similarly strong language in relation to the flood which did not bring about total destruction and an *ex nihilo* creation.[393] This leads Wolters to conclude that the text of 2 Peter 3:1-13 "stresses the permanence of the created earth, despite the coming judgement."[394] Though Moo urges a degree of caution regarding Wolters conclusion, he too notes that there is no unambiguous claim to the destruction of the present earth.[395]

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[388] Al Wolters, "Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:1-10", *Westminster Theological Journal* (49), (1987), 407-408. For discussions regarding cosmology in 2 Peter 3, see John Dennis, "Cosmology in Peterine Literature and Jude" in Jonathan T. Pennington & Sean M. McDonough eds., *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 157-177.
[389] Wolters, "Worldview", 408.
[390] Moo, "Environment", 159.
[391] Heide, "What is New", 54-55; Wolters, "Worldview", 408-409.
[392] Heide, "What is New", 55.
[393] Fanning, *Revelation,*
[394] Wolters, "Worldview", 413.
[395] Moo, "Environment", 159.

Thirdly, John employs the word καινός rather than νέος when speaking about the climax of salvation history (Rev 21:1-2, 5). The term νέος communicates the sense of "fresh", something brand new and could more easily support the destructionist perspective.[396] However the term καινός denotes a sense of "unused" or "unknown".[397] Harrisville suggests that sharp distinction between these terms should not be drawn since they can be seen as synonymous in the NT text.[398] This may be true, but as Beale notes, there is a qualitative distinction being made by John's use of καινός.[399] Smalley also refers to this distinction suggesting that what is spoken of is a transfiguring of the present creation by the Lamb-Messiah.[400] This is something Harrisville agrees with, but would not draw his conclusion based on the καινός terminology alone.[401] Fanning is not convinced with this line of argument suggesting that John does not give his hearers enough explicitness to draw such conclusions.[402] John's use of καινός may not be a strong enough case on its own. However, the wider context suggests that this terminology is being used purposefully to describe a specific type of newness.

Fourthly, Heide comments on John's disclosure of the first heaven and earth's disappearance.[403] The verb ἀπέρχομαι (Rev 21:1) is commonly translated into English as "passed away" (e.g. ESV, NIV, NRSV, NASB). In English this holds connotations of death which Heide argues are not intended by John. Instead the verb here suggests "to depart" or "to go away".[404] If so, John is not talking in destructive but spatial terms; the first heaven and

[396] BDAG, 536.
[397] BDAG, 394.
[398] R. A. Harrisville, "The Concept of Newness in the New Testament", *Journal of Biblical Literature (74.2)*, (1955), 69-79.
[399] Beale, *Revelation*, 1040.
[400] Smalley, *Revelation*, 524.
[401] Harrisville, "Concept of Newness", 74-75. Constraints in this work mean a more developed discussion of Harrisville's markers of newness cannot be undertaken. However, I find his contribution to be helpful, adding depth to a renawlist interpretation.
[402] Fanning, *Revelation*, 529.
[403] Heide, "What is New", 43-44.
[404] Heide, "What is New", 43.

earth have been removed from his sight (Και είδον…απήλθαν). As such we read that John is not communicating about the destruction of the first heaven and first earth, but is helping the churches to hear that "God is not making all things anew. He is making all things as new."[405]

Finally, the concept of newness is addressed in other NT texts which we do not have time to explore. For example, how does Paul's argument concerning the liberation of creation fit into a destructionist paradigm (Rom 8:18-25)? What about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (Luke 24:13-49; John 20:16-23; 9-14)? There is a qualitative difference to Jesus's physical body (John 20:19) but he is recognisable to his followers. Or how does this perspective explain the newness of the believer described by Paul when he uses the same terms (2 Cor 5:7)? Let me be clear, there is obviously an element of 'destruction' which takes place. Old must pass in order for the new to take its place. As the physical body dies and goes through 'destruction' so too creation experiences a form of 'destruction' (Rom 8:18-25; 2 Cor 5:7).[406] The cumulative weight of the Scripture, Jewish apocalyptic literature and the language John employs presents a compelling case to see God's eschatological purposes in creation as a great renewal rather than a complete destruction and replacement. As such, I suggest that the newness spoken of is best understood as a renewal and this will guide our discussions of the city portrayed in Revelation 21:1-22:5.

New Jerusalem

We can now address the main question of this chapter. How are we to understand the city imagery in Revelation 21:1-22:5? Are we to view John's urban imagery through a spiritual lens relating only to spiritual realities about God's people and God's presence? If so, do these texts have anything to say about a physical city? Alternatively, does Revelation

[405] Heide, "What is New", 44. See Also, Tabb, *All Things New*, 188.
[406] Beale, *Revelation*, 1040.

21:1-22:5 speak in more literal terms about the urban world? And if so, does John's vision of new Jerusalem address the future reality of the city in the renewed creation?

To answer these questions I will provide exegetical discussion of Revelation 21:1-22:5 on a thematic basis as I did in the previous chapter. Three lines of enquiry present themselves.[407] First, I will assess the motif as a referent to people (Rev 21:2-3, 8-9, 24, 26). If the texts are read from a spiritual perspective it seems that this is a description of the church presented in perfection. Secondly, the city is linked with the presence of God and as such demands consideration (Rev 21:2-3, 22-23; 22:3-4). In "Babylon" God is rejected, however in new Jerusalem he is central to the imagery. This suggests that to understand the city imagery it is essential to understand divine presence in relation to the city. Finally, I will consider the new Jerusalem as place. Given the physical descriptions of the city in the texts it can be argued that John sees an urban world which is both similar, but also unlike anything humanity has ever experienced. My aim in this chapter is to show that John is describing the urban world *par excellence* which will be revealed at the consummation of God's kingdom. Instead of viewing people, presence and place as detached categories to be handled in isolation from each other, I will show that they are intricately linked to God's purposes in creation (Gen 1:28) and find fulfilment in the new city of the new creation.

People

Assessing city imagery as reference to the people of God raises two questions (Rev 21:2-3, 8-9, 24, 26). First, is new Jerusalem only a symbol of God's redeemed people with no reference to place?[408] Gundry argues that John "is not describing the eternal dwelling place of the saints; he is describing them, and them alone."[409] He continues stating that new Jerusalem

[407] My framework for this exegesis builds from three headings touched on by Bauckham, *Theology*, 126-143.
[408] Robert H. Gundry, 'The New Jerusalem: People as Place not Place for People', *Novum Testamentum (29.3),* (1987), 254-264.
[409] Gundry, 'Jerusalem', 256.

is "God's dwelling place in the saints rather than their dwelling place on earth."[410] Given the context of suffering which these believers were about to endure, John wants them "to see in the New Jerusalem, not their future dwelling place, but – what was even more heartening – their future selves and state."[411] Hendriksen also speaks of new Jerusalem as "the ideal church of the future foreshadowed by the ideal church of the present" but then conflates images to show "the city is the bride; the two are identical. Both indicate the church of God."[412] Gundry has a similar formula; "the city = the bride-wife = the saints".[413] With more nuance, Beale concludes that "construe[ing] 21:9ff. as a vision of a future literal city is to miss its fundamental symbolic nature".[414]

A complex factor in this discussion is the blending of urban and feminine imagery. In the previous chapter we noted the use of feminine personification for Babylon (Rev 17:1; 4-6; 15; 18; 18:2; 7). John has also used feminine personification to describe Christ's relationship to his people (Rev 19:7-8; cf. Rev 5:5-6, 9-10).[415] This is not an original motif as it is deeply rooted in the narrative of the OT where God is married to his people at Mt. Sinai (Ex 19:4-6; cf. Rev 5:9-10),[416] a faithful husband to an unfaithful bride (Isa 50:1; 54:4-8; Jer 3:20; Hos 2:16-20) and promises renewed intimacy with his people (Isa 62:3-5). Jesus picks up marital language referring to himself as the bridegroom of God's people (Matt 9:15; Mk 2:19; Lk 5:34-35). There are also strong correlations between the bride (Rev 19:7-8; 21:2-3, 9) and the beautiful woman representing the persecuted yet protected people of God (Rev 12:1). Unlike Babylon the whore, new Jerusalem is a bride. As Tabb puts it "John deliberately contrasts the bride's enduring beauty with the harlot's borrowed bling."[417] It is

[410] Gundry, 'Jerusalem', 256.
[411] Gundry, 'Jerusalem', 264.
[412] Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors,* 201.
[413] Gundry, 'Jerusalem', 257.
[414] Beale, *Revelation,*
[415] Fanning, *Revelation,* 480.
[416] T. D. Alexander, *Exodus,* AOTC, (London: Apollos, 2017), 375-376.
[417] Tabb, *All Things,* 183.

clear that bridal imagery is a common metaphor for describing the relationship between God and his people.

However the texts under discussion do not demand that new Jerusalem's urban imagery be conflated with the marital imagery. Instead, a degree of ambiguity must be retained allowing the fullness of these images to speak. This ambiguity is argued for by Smalley who holds both images closely, but distinctly, stating that the bride "is to be equated with the saints… but not with the new Jerusalem."[418] Fanning argues similarly, but holds these images more closely;

> "Despite the figurative language used in both phrases and throughout the following description, we are not forced to choose between these two symbols. The two ideas of people living in intimacy with the God who loved them and chose to be his forever (the bride) and living in vibrant community with one another, enjoying God's abundant provision and security (the city, a place), easily cohere. Both figures bring something important to our understanding of the future reality they point to. This does not require an either-or choice."[419]

Two motifs are at play in this section and there is no necessity to conflate the bride and the city (people and place) in order to remain faithful to the text. It also supports the argument being made throughout. God's purpose has always been to establish a people in a place of his provision in fulfilment of the cultural mandate (Gen 1:28). The city motif does refer to the people of God, but this is only part of what is being conveyed in the imagery.

[418] Smalley, *Revelation*, 537. Also Aune, *Revelation*, 1122; Koester, *Revelation*, 191.
[419] Fanning, *Revelation*, 538.

A second question now arises. If the city in part acts as an image for people, who are these people? There are three groups presented in the text; overcomers (Rev 21:3, 7; cf. Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21), the unfaithful (Rev 21:8) and a combination of τα έθνη and οί βασιλείς της γης (Rev 21:24). At first reading this is a surprising inclusion since "the nations" and "the kings" are portrayed as affiliates of the Babylonian whore (Rev 17:1-2; 18:3, 9), in league with the beast (Rev 13:7; 19:15; 20:8) and warped by deceit (Rev 16:14; 17:2; 18:3, 9-10; 19:19). However, I believe there is a coherent argument which can be traced across Scripture highlighting an expectation that the "nations" and "kings" would be included in Christ's redeemed people, residents of new Jerusalem, as will be shown below.

Such a proposition is not without its challenges.[420] For example, Gonzalez & Gonzalez propose that "the redemption of the nations – at least of those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life – is a process that is not finished with the creation of the new earth."[421] This seems incoherent in light of both the textual evidence in Revelation (Rev 21:8, 27; 22:14-15) and the overall trajectory of salvation history (e.g. Matt 25:31-46; Acts 17: 30-31; 2 Thes 1:5-10). However, they are not alone as Caird argues along similar lines seeking to retain continuity in Revelation's use of the nations/kings terminology.[422] Undoubtedly linguistic consistency is important in exegetical work, but Caird's uniformity avoids the fluid nature of language in the book of Revelation. It seems that both of these proposals skirt closely (or potentially stray) into salvific universalism.[423] This is problematic canonically and irreconcilable contextually (Rev 20:11-15).

Alternatively I suggest that the nations/kings language and imagery are not surprising or unexpected for at least two reasons. First, Bauckham is correct in speaking of the language

[420] For a helpful overview see M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, Interpretation, (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 2011), 271-275.
[421] Gonzalez & Gonzalez, *Revelation*, 143.
[422] G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St John the Divine*, (London: Hendrickson, 1966), 279.
[423] For brief discussion and definition see, N. T. Wright 'Universalism' in Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright & J.I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology*, (Leicester: IVP, 1998), 701-703.

as "universalistic".[424] I understand him to be speaking about the global scope of God's salvation, not salvific universalism.[425] The nations/kings language offers "more universalistic hope for the conversion of the nations to the worship of the true God".[426] Early in the apocalypse there is indication of this with positive use of the fourfold formula anticipating the ingathering of the nations/kings (Rev 5:9; 7:9-10). There also exists a deliberate allusion in Revelation 21:24-26 to Isa 60:1-3, 5b:

> "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising… the wealth of the nations shall come to you."

Such clear allusion to Isaiah suggests that John is giving new meaning to nations/kings terminology at the climax of the book.[427] No longer are the nations/kings only to be seen as the enemy of God's people, some are also recipients of his gracious redemption in Christ and their desire is to worship God (Isa 60:11b; Rev 21:26). Salvific universalism is not in sight; instead we are to recognise that former enemies and persecutors "have repented and will be allowed access to the city."[428] Identifying the allusion to Isaiah also means there is no need to solve any issues of a bipartite existence of the redeemed and the nations in the

[424] Bauckham, *Climax*, 238.
[425] Bauckham, *Climax*, 239; see also Wright 'Universalism', 702.
[426] Bauckham, *Climax*, 242-243.
[427] Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 574; Smalley, *Revelation*, 558.
[428] Beale, *Revelation*, 1097.

new creation.[429] Instead, a great transformation is in view where God will make "all things new" (Rev 21:5), including people from among all the nations and kings of the world.[430]

But what of those who do not repent? The unrepentant from among the nations/kings will not be present in the new creation. To argue otherwise misrepresents the thrust of John's argument from Isaiah (Isa 60:12; Rev 21:27), the finality of the judgement which precedes this section (Rev 20:11-15; cf. Ezek 13:9; Dan 12:1) and the direct indication of exclusion from God's renewed world (Rev 21:8, 27). What can be seen textually is "unmitigated death" which leads to "final and complete separation from God, the source of life".[431] It is also misleading to suggest a salvific universalist approach since contemporaneous Jewish apocalyptic texts also portray the destruction and exclusion of those who are not redeemed (e.g. 1QM). Here I agree with Gundry; "To be outside of the city, then, is not to be outside it on earth. It means to be on earth not at all; rather, in the lake of fire."[432]

A second reason for reading the nations/kings terminology this way is found in the canon of scripture. I will briefly chart some key texts which cumulatively show God's design for including the nations/kings in his people. Genesis 10 provides an important backdrop for understanding the language of nations/kings.[433] Scott has argued that geographically, ethnologically and eschatologically Genesis 10 has shaped the OT.[434] It therefore makes sense that parallels with this text are found in the climax of the canon. With use of a similar fourfold formula John links Gen 10 with Revelation 5:9 & 7:9. Linguistically there is remarkable crossover between the Gen 10 (LXX) and Revelation; tribes (φυλή), language

[429] Smalley, *Revelation*, 559.
[430] Smith, *Liberating*, 137.
[431] Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 97.
[432] Gundry, 'Jerusalem', 263.
[433] For a detailed discussion of Genesis 10 and its influence on OT and early Judaism see James M. Scott, *Paul and the Nations: The Old Testament and Jewish Background of Paul's Mission to the Nations with Special Reference to the Destination of Galatians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 5-56.
[434] Scott, *Nations*, 55.

(γλῶσσα), country (χώρα) and nation (ἔθνος). An allusion to the fourfold formula in Dan 7:14 is apparent. However, this development suggests that John also returns to human origins for source material. This should influence the way we read the final occurrence of nations/kings terminology.[435] Hays acknowledges this stating that "God's plan for human history includes the reversal of the judgemental aspects of Genesis for those who trust Christ. The curse is removed…and the scattered ones (every tribe, language, people and nation), once separated from God, are now brought together under the reign of the Lamb".[436]

In Genesis 11 we are shown humanity's deliberate rejection of God's command (Gen 11:1-9; cf. Gen 1:28) which is met with gracious covenantal blessing centred on one actor, Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). The fullness of God's promise in Eden of a child who would bring redemption (Gen 3:15) now has a focal point in salvation history. As Wright states, *"Blessing for the nations is the bottom line, textually and theologically, of God's promise to Abraham."*[437] This promise is repeated in different forms across the text of Genesis (Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4-5; 28:14) highlighting its importance in God's purposes. It is developed in Exodus where God explains the reason for the conflict which is taking place with Pharaoh: "I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth" (Ex 9:16). Though the final phrase could be translated "in all the land" there seems to be a global perspective at play.[438] This global reading is vindicated since Ex 12:38 records that "a mixed multitude also went up with them". From the outset, God's people are not a mono-ethnic block; they are a multi-ethnic grouping bringing colour to the promise delivered to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3).

[435] See also the NT table of nations Acts 2:9-10.
[436] J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (NSBT), (Leicester: Apollos, 2003), 196.
[437] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, (Nottingham: IVP, 2006), 194. Italics original.
[438] Alexander, *Exodus*, 190.

This theme gathers momentum throughout the OT with a distinctly eschatological flavour. For example, in the book of Isaiah there are multiple references to the blessing and inclusion of the nations;

> "In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples – of him shall the nations enquire, and his resting place shall be glorious… He shall raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth." (Isa 11:10, 12)

> "In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance." (Isa 19:23-25)

> "On this mountain the Lord if hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations." (Isa 25:6-7)

The book of Psalms adds further weight to this reading of the kings/nations terminology in Revelation 21:24-26 (Ps. 22:27-28; 47:9; 67:1-2; 72:17; 86:9; 96:1-3). Of particular interest is the overlap between Ps. 96 and Revelation 14:6-7. Bauckham suggests that Ps. 96 is the text which provides the backdrop for John's description of "the eternal

gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation, and tribe, and language, and people" (Rev 14:6).[439] He argues, "The eternal gospel is therefore the call which Psalm 96 itself contains, the call to all nations to worship the one true God who is coming to judge the world and to establish his universal rule."[440] As such, "we can see that John's expectation of the conversion of the nations has one of its Old Testament roots in the remarkably universalistic theology of these psalms."[441] One final text from the OT offers insight into John's expectation of the kings/nations conversion;

> "Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favour of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying 'let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'" (Zech 8:22-23)

Opening the NT is a programmatic insight into the conversion of the nations in Matthew's gospel. Among the first people to accept the arrival of the Jewish Messiah are Magi from the East (Matt 2:1-2, 10-11). It is plausible that the Magi could have been inhabitants of Babylon "where a sizeable Jewish settlement wielded considerable influence".[442] If so, it is possible that we have an inclusio in which a foretaste of God's kingdom among the nations (particularly Babylon) is seen in Matthew and comes to fulfilment in Revelation.[443] A broader inclusio of the NT may be harder to substantiate.

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[439] Bauckham, *Climax*, 287-289.
[440] Bauckham, *Climax*, 288.
[441] Bauckham, *Climax*, 289.
[442] D. A. Carson., *Matthew: 1-12*, Expositors Biblical Commentary NIV, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 85.
[443] G. K. Beale., *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 567. Here Beale shows the link between Isa 60: 1-6; 14, Matt 2:1-11 and Rev 21:24-26 but does not refer to it as an inclusio for the NT.

However, it is clear that a gentile, kings/nations inclusio exists in Matthew since the climax of his Gospel sees Jesus commission his followers to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19a; cf. Gen 1:28; Luke 24:46-47).

In the book of Acts there are multiple instances speaking directly or indirectly about the inclusion of the nations in God's people. Allusion to the table of nations is prominent on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:9-10; Gen 10) which adds weight to the observation made earlier. Philip proclaims the messiah to an Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40), Paul's conversion includes a commissioning "to carry my name before the gentiles and kings" (Acts 9:15) and Peter's paradigm of inclusion altered (Acts 10:34-43). Perhaps most strikingly is how Paul relates the gospel with the promise of God to Abraham:

> "the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith." (Gal 3:8-9)

Commenting on this text Schreiner notes "God's intention from the beginning to bless the gentiles, as long as they exercised the same kind of faith as Abraham."[444] To be part of the people of God therefore is to have faith in the promise of God.[445] In relation to my argument it means that the nations/kings in question (Rev 21:24) are those who have faith in the promise of God and so reside in new Jerusalem.

While it could be argued that this is only proof texting, I suggest that this displays a coherent and progressively developing argument which makes it hard to suggest that John is

[444] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians* (ZECNT), (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 194.
[445] Schreiner, *Galatians*, 194.

speaking about salvific universalism. John is communicating God's universalistic purpose for all peoples which he has seen come to fruition (Rev 21:9, 22). Using a pallet of canonical colour, blending hues of expectation and fulfilment, John points the churches to the reality of the eschatological consummation of God's kingdom. The 'nations/kings' (Rev 21:24, 26) are those who have been ransomed for God by the blood of the Lamb (Rev 5:9), have come to worship him (Rev 7:10) and believe in the eternal gospel (Rev 14:7). As Hays puts it, "God's intention is for his people to be multi-ethnic and multicultural, but yet united in their fellowship and their worship of him."[446] It is an entirely different form of existence to that which is offered to the nations and kings by Babylon (Rev 17:2; 18:3, 9). We can see therefore that the city motif partly points to the people of God. They are united in worship of the Lamb but diverse in culture and ethnicity. However, it is only one aspect of what is being communicated and should not to be flattened out to such an extent that it refers only to the people of God.

Presence

We move now to considering the presence of God and the city motif. The book of Revelation is theocentric (Rev 4-5) and its climax revolves around the presence of God (Rev 21:2-4; 22:1-4). What may be surprising is the location of God's presence; God resides in a city (Rev 21:22-23). Although this may seem unexpected since certain passages canonically (Gen 4:17; 11:1-9; 18:16-19:29) and contextually (Rev 17:1-18:24) suggest the corrupt nature of cities, there is a thread of thought running through the canon which suggests otherwise (e.g. Gen 1:28; Ex 15:17-18; Lev 26:11-12; Deut 4:5-8; 2 Sam 5:6-10; Ps. 46:4-5; 48:1-3, 12-14).[447] Four areas can be identified which show the importance of God's presence to

[446] Hays, *Every People*, 199.
[447] See Alexander, *City*, 41.

understanding the city motif. First, I will consider the strange topographical feature of no sea (Rev 21:1) and, secondly, examine the cosmological discontinuity of no sun or moon (Rev 21:23). I will then explore the lack of a temple building in new Jerusalem (Rev 21:22-23) and show that this is intricately linked to God's presence in the city with his people (Rev 21:3, 22; 22:4; cf. Gen 3:22-24). Fourthly, human life is altered by God's presence in the city and this too demands attention (Rev 21:4).[448]

No sea

One of the strange details John describes is that ἡ θάλασσα οὐκ ἔστιν ἔτι (Rev 21:1c). What is meant by the disappearance of the sea? And why does God's presence bring about such radical change? Some suggest that this is evidence of cosmic replacement which I have already argued against.[449] Others note that the sea is the place of evil/Roman resistance to God's rule and reign as seen in the vision of the beast (Rev 13:1, 6-7).[450] Therefore no more sea means no more evil. Fiorenza supports this[451] as does Paul who argues that the imagery shows "there are no parts of the renewed cosmos which deny or resist God's rule".[452] Bauckham highlights that the lack of sea is the "one feature which makes [the new creation], really eschatologically new" because it brings to an end the forces of evil and chaos in the cosmos.[453] His point is overemphasised since the exclusion of night (Rev 22:5 cf. Gen 1:5) suggests an equally important element of newness. Although I cannot agree with the lack of sea as a sign of cosmic replacement, I can see merit to understanding this imagery as a

[448] A note of clarification: discussion of God's presence in new Jerusalem does not preclude God's presence in his creation at present. God is present and active in creation, but as Bauckham says "his presence is only a paradoxical presence". Bauckham, *Theology*, 140.
[449] Aune, *Revelation*, 1117-1120. See also Thomas & Macchia, *Revelation*, 364.
[450] Mounce, *Revelation*, 381.
[451] Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 110.
[452] Paul, *Revelation*, 339.
[453] Bauckham, *Theology*, 53.

removal of evil. However, there seems to be more going on when considered from a wider biblical theological perspective.

Jonathan Moo provides discussion of sea imagery in the book of Revelation.[454] While sea imagery has links to the Genesis creation narrative, ANE creation myths and the context of the 1st century world, Moo argues that it is best understood in light of OT anticipation of an eschatological exodus.[455] His observation picks up on a prominent OT theme beginning with the initial flight from Egypt (Ex 14:21-29; 15:4-10).[456] It is then developed by Isaiah (Isa 11:15; 43:2, 16-21; 51:9-11), Zechariah (Zech 10:11-12) and various allusions to the exodus can be identified in the psalter (Ps. 66:6-7; 74:13-14; 77:16-20; 78:13, 53; 106:9-11; 114:3; 136:12-16). This suggests that John is drawing on a pre-existing framework escalating the connection between creation, exodus and new creation.[457]

I would also expand this recognising that the imagery is a promise that judgement is fully and finally complete because God has removed all evil (Rev 20:11-15). Given the covenant made with Noah (Gen 9:8-17) and the reappearance of the rainbow in the throne room scene (Rev 4:3), the lack of sea surely hints at security from flooding judgement. As Bauckham says, "God makes his creation eternally secure from any threat of destructive evil…Revelation portrays God as faithful to the Noahic covenant and indeed surpassing it in his faithfulness to his creation".[458] As such, this text is not evidence of cataclysmic obliteration of marine vistas. Rather it is imagery which depicts the end of old world threats in God's presence.[459] In the city God's end time eschatological purposes of redemption and

[454] Jonathan Moo, 'The Sea That is No More Rev 21:1and the Function of Sea Imagery in the Apocalypse of John', *Novum Testamentum*, 51.2, (2009), 148-167.
[455] Moo, 'Sea', 162-165.
[456] See also Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15, (IVP: Leicester, 2003), 100.
[457] Moo, 'Sea', 164. See also Beale, *Revelation*, 1042-1043.
[458] Bauckham, *Theology*, 53.
[459] Beale, *Revelation*, 1043.

removal of evil will be experienced by his people. Whatever evils were present in the city will no longer exist because of the presence of God in its midst.

No luminaries

A second strange detail is the seeming alteration of cosmological structure with God's presence in the new Jerusalem. We are told καὶ ἡ πόλις οὐ χρείαν ἔχει τοῦ ἡλίου οὐδὲ τῆς σελήνης ἵνα φαίνωσιν αὐτῇ (Rev 21:23a) because of the presence of God (Rev 21:23b). This is later followed with the explanation καὶ νὺξ οὐκ ἔσται (Rev 22:5a). What is John communicating? Walvoord takes these images as literal depictions of the new creation where sun and moon are absent.[460] However, it seems that the existence of heavenly luminaries is not the focus of the text. Instead, as Beale proposes, this figurative language points to the reality that "God's glory is incomparable in relation to any source of light of either the old or new creation."[461] The creator outshines the creation, whether old or new. Even if there is disagreement about the existence of luminaries, there is broad agreement that John is drawing on Isaiah's eschatological future:

> "The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light and your days of mourning shall be ended." (Isa 60:19-20)

[460] Walvoord, *Revelation*, 326-327.
[461] Beale, *Revelation*, 1093.

This parallel is striking and points toward relational transformation between God and his creation rather than changes to cosmological structures. In this detail we are shown that God's presence is no longer mediated but experienced in full. The barrier between profane and holy has been overcome by the Lamb (Rev 21:22-23; cf. Gen 3:3, 14-24; Lev 17:11; Lk: 24:44-47; John 1:29; Rom 3:23-25; Rev 5:6, 9-10).[462] Unlike Babylon where light will shine no more (Rev 18:23a) "this holy city is enlightened by the Lamb himself!"[463] No longer will the city have spectres or shadowlands, it is the residence of God and will be filled with light and life. As Schreiner says, "the glory of the new creation is seeing the glory of God."[464] The true glory of the city is the unmediated presence of God.

No temple

John's third announcement is equally striking, "I saw no temple in the city" (Rev 21:22). Aune suggests that "an anti-temple and anti-priestly polemic" in Judaism at the time was influencing John.[465] However I believe that it is more plausible to conclude that John's eschatological expectations were being developed in greater ways than he could have anticipated (cf. Ezek 37:27-28; 43:2-5; 48:35b; Hag 2:9; Zech 1:16; 6:12-15). Two details aid in confirming this.

First, John's announcement that he saw no temple in new Jerusalem is subsequent to the throne declaration, a statement which contains important terminology which has already surfaced in the canon (Rev 21:3). The noun σκηνή (tent/dwelling place)[466] and verb σκηνόω (to tabernacle/dwell) correspond to the Hebrew root verb שכן (dwell).[467] In the LXX σκηνή

[462] See Smalley, *Revelation*, 556-557.
[463] Thomas & Macchia, *Revelation*, 383.
[464] Schreiner, *King*, 627.
[465] Aune, *Revelation*, 1166.
[466] BDAG, 754.
[467] Gerald H. Wilson, 'שכן', in Willem A. VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol.4 (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 109-111.

language is chosen to render the Hebrew שׁכנ. Significantly, שׁכנ is used to describe the formation of God's earthly dwelling (Ex 25:8) and the settling (משכני) of God's presence in the midst of his people (Ex 40:34-35; Lev 26:11). Recognising the importance of this language John employs it throughout Revelation in ways which show God's covenant care for his people (Rev 7:15; 12:12; 13:6; 15:5). Only one other occurrence of this language is found in the NT outside of Revelation; ὁ λόγος σὰρχ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν (John 1:14).[468] Tracing this language across the canon shows God coming near to his people, speaking with Moses (Ex 33:9) and the display of his glory (Ex 40:34-35). God's nearness is even closer when the Word takes up residence in the midst of his people as a man (John 1:14a) displaying the glory of God (John 1:14b). What John hears from the throne develops this theme and points to the eschatological fulfilment of God's commitment in Lev 26:11; "I will make my dwelling among you". Dwelling language is therefore intricately bound to the covenant relationship which exists between God, his people and how both will live together.

Secondly, having reviewed the pivotal language of the throne declaration it is now possible to assess the city's architectural void (Rev 21:22). Mounce suggests that John is abandoning the vision of Ezek 40-48 which is an overstatement. [469] Instead, it appears that John recognises the direct presence of God and the Lamb as that which both fulfils and supersedes Ezekiel's depiction (e.g. Ezek 43:7).[470] No longer is there separation of the holy and the profane; the entire city is to be viewed as holy.[471] This claim is substantiated by the dimensions of the city (Rev 21:16) which align with the holy of holies (1 Kings 6:20; 2 Chron 3:8-9) and Ezekiel's temple vision (45:1-5; 48:8-13). Where the dominant shape described in the OT is that of a square, John's vision escalates this form describing a cube,

[468] Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John,* BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 2004), 41.
[469] Mounce, *Revelation,* 395.
[470] Beale, *Revelation,* 1091.
[471] Boring, *Revelation,* 261.

showing the fullness and finality which God's presence brings to the city.[472] Put simply, "there is no temple because symbol has given way to reality."[473] The city is the temple since it is the residence of God.

Furthermore the description of new Jerusalem as temple can be contrasted against the shadowy figure of Babylon. There are strong parallels between descriptions of new Jerusalem in the text and the architecture of ancient Babylon (Herodotus 1.178-179). Some scholars also advocate that the temple city described in Revelation 21:15-17 can be viewed as a pyramid. If so, it would correspond with the Babylonian ziggurat (Gen 11:4), a temple city which touched heaven.[474] Not all agree with this assessment since there is nothing in the text which demands this reading. There are benefits to seeing this comparison, since it links the Ziggurat of Shinar, the Babylonian empire of the ANE and the Roman conquest of the 1st century world where connection with the divine came through human effort to ascend. Whether the city is pyramidal or cubic in shape does not alter the direction of travel: God is coming down to take up residence among his people in the shape of a holy urban dwelling.[475] In new Jerusalem God is settling down in the city with his people, an act of unmerited grace and in this the final words of Ezekiel's vision have found fulfilment; "The Lord Is There" (Ezek 48:35). God's presence is no longer mediated; God's people will see him face to face in the perfect city (Rev 22:4; cf. Gen 2:8; Ex 33:11).

No effects of sin

Finally, these details culminate to describe the anthropological impact of God's unmediated presence in the city: the death of death and its associated entourage (Rev 21:4).[476]

[472] Beale, *Revelation*, 1073.
[473] Mounce, *Revelation*, 395.
[474] Smalley, *Revelation*, 552.
[475] Beale, *Revelation*, 1075.
[476] Gonzalez & Gonzalez, *Revelation*, 138.

There are three details that I will focus on beginning with John's use of OT prophecy which points towards the eschatological fulfilment of God's ultimate purposes. Secondly, this fulfilment takes place through the removal of the curse which plagues God's creation (Rev 22:3; cf. Gen 3:14-24). Here I will argue that the curse in view is Edenic in origin and is substantiated by the deliberate juxtaposition of the "no more" statements (Rev 18:21b-23a; 21:4) concerning the demise of Babylon and the flourishing of new Jerusalem. Finally, with the removal of the curse there is a stunning vision of the peoples/nations of the world cohabiting in new Jerusalem where healing and restoration takes place through God's sovereign provision (Rev 22:2b).

John makes two allusions in Revelation 21:4 to the book of Isaiah. First, he points to the climax of God's people experiencing eternal respite in his presence which has been foreshadowed by Isaiah (Isa 25:8; cf. Isa 65:19). John's allusion could also hint back to the feasting imagery in Revelation 19:9 given the content of Isaiah's message (Isa 25:6-8).[477] This would make sense since the people of God will not only enter into eternal respite in the city[478] but eternal joy as communicated by the feasting/wedding imagery.[479] Here the city is viewed not as a place of dread and mistreatment, but the location of joy, God's presence.

A second allusion connects the eschatological hope of Revelation 21:4 to the eschatological hope of Isa 51:11 (cf. Isa 35:10). The transformation in Revelation 21:4 is "an expansion of the opening comment in 21:1 that "there is no longer any sea"'.[480] Beale's argument is supported by Smalley[481] and it also aligns with the idea of an eschatological exodus I have addressed earlier. In Isa 51:10 there is direct reference to God's parting of the Red Sea (Ex 14:21-22). As Beale argues, John seems to be suggesting that in an intensified

[477] Abernethy, *Kingdom*, 37-39.
[478] Beale, *Revelation*, 1049.
[479] Hendriksen, *Conquerors*, 200.
[480] Beale, *Revelation*, 1049.
[481] Smalley, *Revelation*, 539.

way God is removing the barrier of "the sea" standing between his people and his presence.[482] I find this argument convincing as it handles both the texts in Isaiah and Revelation sensitively as well as picking up on a major theme running through the canon.

However, I suggest an expansion which takes the wider context of Isa 51:9 into consideration. Preceding the rolling back of the sea (Isa 51:10) and entrance into the city (Isa 51:11) stands a conflict where the Lord has "pierced the dragon" (Isa 51:9). As noted already Hamilton has written about the connection between the seed of the woman and the crushing of the serpent (Gen 3:15). In his essay he does make reference to Isa 51:9, but does not discuss it in light of the allusion made to Isaiah 51:10-11 in Revelation 21:1, 4. [483] In the fullest sense the new exodus, bringing the people of God into God's presence, must be seen explicitly as that which takes place through the defeat of the dragon. As in Isaiah, the dragon is pierced and then the waters subside, so too in Revelation this trajectory holds (Isa 51:9-11; cf. Rev 20:1-3, 7-10; 21:1; 4). Through the defeat of Satan, sin and death, the people of God experience the unmediated presence of God in the city, bringing fulfilment to the prophetic expectations of Isaiah 51:9-11.

However, there is only true fulfilment when the curse is removed (Rev 22:3a). Many connect Revelation 22:3a to Zechariah 14:11 where "there shall never again be a decree of utter destruction".[484] Zechariah writes eschatologically and it seems likely that John sees new Jerusalem as the escalated fulfilment of this expectation.[485] These texts are connected linguistically by the terms κατάμεθα (Rev 22:3)[486] and ἀνάθεμα (Zech 11:4 LXX) with

[482] Beale, *Revelation*, 1049.
[483] Hamilton, 'Seed', 29.
[484] Aune, *Revelation*, 1178; Beale, *Revelation*, 1112-1113; Smalley, *Revelation*, 564; Osborne, *Revelation*, 772-773.
[485] Fanning, *Revelation*, 555.
[486] κατάμεθα is a *Hapax Legomenon* in both the LXX and NT.

each term a legitimate translation of the Hebrew root חרם denoting religious ban or destruction.[487] It is therefore argued that God has removed the curse placed on apostate Israel and the unrepentant nations of the world who have trusted in Christ.[488]

Although allusion to Zechariah 14:11 is present, it seems unlikely that this is the only or even the primary curse in view. I contended that Revelation 22:3 is primarily a reference to God's removal of the Edenic curse (Gen 3:14-19) once again connecting new Jerusalem with the cultural mandate (Gen 1:28). The use of Edenic imagery in the surrounding context (Rev 22:2) make it "difficult to imagine…as anything other than removal of the curse incurred by humanity via the disobedience of Adam and Eve."[489] Smalley also argues that the expulsion (or ban)[490] of Adam and Eve from Eden (Gen 3:20-24) is the "the backcloth to this scene".[491] Paul creates a distinction focusing only on the reversal of the curse.[492] But both the curse (Gen 3:14-19) and the expulsion (Gen 3:20-24) need to be held together since the reversal which takes place in new Jerusalem resolves both tensions. With the removal of the curse (Rev 22:3: cf. Gen 3:14-19) there is the restoration of being in the same place as God since this is what is lost in Eden (3:20-24).

Is it credible therefore to argue that the city is inherently evil when God chooses to make this his residence? Following this, how can the city be inherently evil when all evil has been consigned to the lake of fire (Rev 20:7-15) and there is no longer anything accursed (Rev 22:3)? I contend that it is not possible to affirm this position. Furthermore, through the juxtaposition of the "no more" statements (Rev 18:21b-23a; 21:4) [493] I argue that the reader is

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[487] Victor P. Hamilton, "חרם" in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol.4, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 276-277.
[488] Beale, *Revelation*, 1112-1113; Osborne, *Revelation*, 772-773.
[489] Thomas & Macchia, *Revelation*, 388.
[490] Although the term for curse in Gen 3:17b (Heb.ארר; GK. ἐπικατάρατος) diverges from that which is found in Rev 22:3 this is not enough to negate the clear allusion to removal of the initial curse.
[491] Smalley, *Revelation*, 564.
[492] Paul, *Revelation*, 360.
[493] Sweet, *Revelation*, 299.

being invited to see all of life transformed in God's presence. Where "life and joy are no longer found" in Babylon (Rev 18:1-24),[494] new Jerusalem presents an urban alternative where human beings flourish in the unmediated presence of God. Since there is nothing accursed in the city, it is possible that some of the activities of purpose and joy which are brought to an end in Babylon will be present in new Jerusalem and find greater fulfilment (Rev 18:21b-22). As Bauckham states "in God's kingdom theonomy (God's rule) and human autonomy (self-determination) will fully coincide.[495] Here we see the fulfilment of the cultural mandate, not by human effort but by divine grace (Gen 1:28).

One final detail to highlight is the resolution of discord between the peoples of the world in the city. Contra Aune, the expulsion of sin is the end of this tension since all nations are reconciled in the people of God (Rev 22:2b; cf. Gen 3:22-23).[496] Here John expands the vision of Ezekiel showing the fulfilment of God's purposes to include the nations in his presence (Ezek 47:12; cf. *1 Enoch* 25:2; 4 Ezra 7:53; 8:52; *2 Enoch* 8:3; Acts 11:17-18; 15:12-14). While there are suggestions that Rev 22:2 points to "life outside of the city, a life to be healed between the different nations" I do not see how this can be the case.[497] Instead, as Osborne notes, this language "symbolises the healing that has already occurred at the eschaton and descending of the eternal city".[498] John envisages "healing in its most holistic and comprehensive fashion encompassing both physical and spiritual healing, for both are part of the salvific work of Jesus."[499] What the builders failed to accomplish at Shinar (Gen 11:1-9) and the Roman empire destroyed through oppression and abuse (Rev 17:15-16; 18:11-13), comes to pass in God's presence. The peoples and nations of the world once alienated from God's presence and each other are no longer at enmity. They are healed by the

[494] Thomas & Macchia, *Revelation*, 366.
[495] Bauckham, *Theology*, 143.
[496] Aune, *Revelation*, 1178.
[497] Gonzalez & Gonzalez, *Revelation*, 144; see also Smalley, *Revelation*, 563.
[498] Osborne, *Revelation*, 772; see also Beale, *Revelation*, 1108.
[499] Thomas & Macchia, *Revelation*, 387.

slain and resurrected Lamb who provides access to the life giving presence of God in the city he provides (Rev 2:7).

Place

The final lens for assessing this motif considers the city as place. It is my contention that the city spoken of in Revelation 21:1-22:5, although highly symbolic, refers to the future urban paradise which will be revealed at the consummation of God's kingdom in the new creation. First, there is a canonical thread which unites the people of God, in the presence of God, in the place provided by God (Gen 1:28; 2:10-17; 12:1). New Jerusalem fulfils the long awaited place where the people of God may dwell alongside the glory of God without hindrance. Second, the "newness" (καινός) which is spoken of brings with it the idea of renewal suggesting that the urban environment is also subject to God's eschatological renewal. Third, the vision of Rome's destruction (Rev 17:1-18:24) is communicated in symbolic terms as "Babylon" but has clear physical application. It is not unreasonable, given the proximity of this opposing vision, to suggest that John communicates about a physical alternative. This can be seen in the language and imagery of Revelation 21:1-22:5 which is thoroughly spatial with reference to place and dimensions. Although most of these references should not be interpreted literally (e.g. Rev 21:15-16) there is a case to be made for recognising the physical nature of what John is communicating. Finally, since human existence is intimately bound to physical space and place, new Jerusalem is presented as an urban alternative; the city as human life *par excellence*.

God's provision and promise of place

The canon begins with an explicit description of humanity as intimately designed and known by God, with physical form, located in a specific place (Gen 1:26-27; 2:7). This final

detail is crucial in considering new Jerusalem. Since place is intrinsic to our humanity we can easily overlook it, particularly when engaging with scripture.[500] Edward Casey writes that "[t]o be at all – to exist in anyway – is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place. Place is as requisite as the air that we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have."[501] Though not speaking about divine revelation, Casey's comments are helpful in aiding this discussion as his insights hold validity when assessed alongside scripture.

Before human beings are formed, the cosmos and the earth exist (Gen 2:5-6); a place has already been prepared. Subsequent to the creation of humanity, God plants a garden creating a specific place for his image bearers (Gen 2:8).[502] The texts suggest that humans have been made with the purposes of inhabiting particular places in relationship with God. As a result of rebellion Adam and Eve are displaced, and the climax of the passage is their ejection from the garden of God's presence which had been crafted for them to live in (Gen 3:20-24). This displacement is addressed directly in the covenant made with Abraham (Gen 12:1; 15:18-21), in the declaration of victory following the exodus (Ex 15:17-18; cf. Rev 21:10) and the conquest of Canaan (Jos 24:13). With increasing clarity we are shown that God is graciously providing a place in which his people may reside with him. Nowhere is that seen more clearly than in the royal city, Jerusalem. Although there have been places and people of importance (Ps. 78:60, 67) God has a specific people and place (Ps 78:68). Jerusalem begins to reunite the important details of God's presence, God's people and God's place (e.g. Ps. 47, 87, 99).[503] Ps. 48 is of particular note;

[500] Craig G. Bartholomew, 'The Theology of Place in Gen 1-3' in J.G. McConville & Karl Möller, *Reading the Law: Studies in Honour of Gordon J. Wenham*, (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 174.
[501] Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997), *ix*
[502] T.D. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 116.
[503] See Alexander, *City*, 65-82.

> "Walk about Zion, go round her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels, that you may tell the next generation that this is our God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us for ever." (Ps. 48:12-14)

Where OT hope was bound to the land and the city of Jerusalem, the coming of Christ ushers in a new era where the church becomes the place of God's residence on earth (Acts 2; 1 Cor 3:16-17; Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:4-8).[504] God's kingdom has come near (Mark 1:15) and Christ's inaugurated reign has profound implications on the promise and provision of place (Mark 13:2; John 2:19-22) leading Bartholomew to argue that "*The Kingdom of God* clearly refers not just to reign but also to realm, and the realm in view is nothing less than the creation as a whole."[505] The sermon on the mount suggests this (Matt 6:10), as do the final words of Jesus before his ascension (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). Paul also develops this perspective speaking in cosmic terms about the reign and realm of Christ (Col 1:15; cf. Ps. 24:1). The kingdom of God is not bound to one political entity, but is made up of anyone who receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. The realm of Christ's rule is cosmic and he poignantly promises place in his kingdom to the first disciples in a way which echoes the provision of place in Eden (John 14:2-3; cf. Gen 2:8).

Drawing an arc between the promise of place given to the patriarchs and the eschatological hope of the early church, the author of Hebrews highlights the expectation of a divine urban dwelling. Patriarchal hope was bound to the promise of God providing a particular place since Abraham "was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God" (Heb 11:10). Subsequently, the author explains that this city is unashamedly built by God for his people (Heb 11:16b) and is the future experience awaiting

[504] Space does not permit a full discussion of this development. For a discussion of this see Alexander, *Eden*, 60-73.
[505] Bartholomew, *Mortals*, 117. Italics original.

all believers (Heb 12:22). In this period of tension between cross and consummation "we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come" (Heb 13:14). Lane believes that this language speaks metaphorically about "the kingdom of God or the reign of God in its totality."[506] I do not disagree with this on one level since the imagery captures the perfection of realised eschatology. However, I suggest that this is not simply a picture, but imagery pointing toward a brick and mortar reality.

Alexander makes a similar argument suggesting that Abraham is moving forward in faith to a God centred metropolis (Heb 11:1).[507] Abraham did not receive the city he hoped for in his lifetime (Heb 11:39) but, as Hoekema argues, the new Jerusalem becomes "the real fulfilment of the inheritance which has been promised to him".[508] While some may not be convinced with this reading, the preceding context of the promises given to Abraham is important (Gen 11:9; 12:1-3).[509] Babylon is founded on the premise of human self-reliance (Gen 11:4), but the promise given to Abraham is stable and binding (Gen 12:1). This promise is authored by God in response to humanity's warped outworking of the cultural mandate (Gen 1:28). What the author of Hebrews seems to be arguing is that in an even greater way God will bring to completion the cultural mandate, providing the perfect city, the promised place. OT expectations are therefore not abandoned but escalated in light of a global eschatological fulfilment.[510]

City renewal

Secondly, there is an argument to be made from the language of newness. While Ellul suggests that new Jerusalem is "the exact opposite of the earthly city" since God "is himself

[506] William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, WBC 47B, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 352.
[507] Alexander, *City*, 148.
[508] Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 314.
[509] It should also be noted that Jewish apocalyptic literature affirms that God's revelation to Abraham of the eschatological city during the covenant ceremony of Gen 15:9-21. See 2 Bar 4:2-5; 4 Ezra 3:13-14.
[510] Bartholomew, *Mortals*, 99-101.

the city"[511] the language of the text does not support such a dichotomised reading.[512] Two details from Revelation 21:1-22:5 converge to suggest this. First, the language of newness (καινός) describes both the city (Rev 21:2) and the experience of human life (Rev 21:5). As noted previously, newness language is connected to renewal rather than replacement.[513] Since "all things" are to be renewed (Rev 21:5) it is reasonable to assert that this has bearing on the city (Rev 21:2) pointing away from Ellul's argument. Following this, John explains "no longer will anything be accursed" (Rev 22:3). It is important to note that this statement follows both the final judgement (Rev 20:11-15) and the arrival of new Jerusalem (Rev 21:1; 10). If there is no longer anything which is accursed in the new creation, it is logical to conclude that the city in the new creation is also subject to God's renewal.

Therefore, to argue that the city is an inherently evil place does not fully represent either the biblical narrative or the texts under consideration. If it were an irredeemable human construct, why does God speak in such terms and images about eschatological hope? Furthermore, why does God choose to establish the throne of heaven (Rev 4) in a city (Rev 22:1; 3)? These texts and the language of newness suggest that the city will undergo renewal at the consummation of God's kingdom. Undoubtedly new Jerusalem will be radically different to what people have experienced before. However the language in the text suggests there will be a level of consistency with the concept of city as we currently understand it. The level of this consistency is unclear, but it is quite possible that the cities which exist at the consummation of the kingdom will remain. After the purging process (2 Peter 3:7) they could become the habitation of God's redeemed people throughout the world with new Jerusalem

[511] Ellul, *City*, 190.
[512] Having already discussed God's presence as essential to understanding the imagery of new Jerusalem, I have no issue about the spiritual nature of the city in Rev 21:1-22:5. However, I would distance myself from affirming that "God is the city" as it is reductionist. It also seems to diminish the role of place affirmed in Eden recaptured in God's provision of new Jerusalem.
[513] BDAG, 394.

as a global capital.[514] Since the nations/kings "will bring their glory into it" (Rev 21:24) it is possible that redeemed peoples of the world could reside in renewed cities throughout the renewed creation.[515]

Physical application

Following on from the biblical narrative and the language of newness there are multiple images which speak of physicality and can be divided into three categories; location, dimension and content. While it is crucial to recognise the symbolic nature of John's imagery at this point[516] it is equally important that the material nature of the imagery is not bypassed.[517] Given the proximity and purposeful juxtaposition to Babylon (Rev 17-18) a similar hermeneutic should be retained when considering the depiction of new Jerusalem (Rev 21:1-22:5). As Bauckham argues, "part of the strategy of Revelation, in creating a symbolic world for its readers to enter, was to redirect their imaginative response to the world."[518] Since place is essential to human existence new Jerusalem's physical description should be taken seriously, if not literally in every sense.[519] After all, to metaphorically "come out" of Babylon (Rev 18:4), requires a holistic alternative, "a centre in the eschatological future towards which they may live."[520]

First, new Jerusalem is given a distinct location on "a great, high mountain" (Rev 21:10). Contrary to some scholars this is not a vantage point from which to see the city,[521] this mountain is "the actual site of the city"[522] drawing a direct parallel to Ezekiel 40:1-2.[523]

[514] Fanning, *Revelation*, 545-546.
[515] Bauckham, *Theology*, 135.
[516] Walvoord, *Revelation*, 319.
[517] Alexander, *City*, 150.
[518] Bauckham, *Theology*, 129.
[519] Bartholomew, *Mortals*, 159.
[520] Bauckham, *Theology*, 130.
[521] Fanning, *Revelation*, 537; Mounce, Revelation, 389; Walvoord, *Revelation*, 320.
[522] Caird, *Revelation*, 269.
[523] Osborne, *Revelation*, 748.

Both OT prophetic expectations and wider Jewish conceptions of God's future residence with his people point in this direction (e.g. Isa 2:2-3; 4:2-5; 25:6-26:2; Mic 4:1-2; *1 Enoch* 18:8; 24:1-4; 25:3; *Jub* 4:26). The Edenic paradise was located on "the holy mountain of God" (Ezek 28:14) and was the anticipated place of eschatological restoration (Isa 11:9; cf. Ps. 24:3)[524] refuting McGee's theory of a city in space.[525] New Jerusalem is grounded and its location on the high mountain stands in contradistinction to Babylon's desert setting (Rev 17:3). Where Babylon has always been established by the work of human hands united against God's rule (Gen 11:1-9; Rev 17:1-18:24) new Jerusalem comes from God (Rev 21:10).[526] This leads Mounce to state that new Jerusalem "is not an achievement of people but a gift from God."[527] It can be seen that, "the very site of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:10 suggests the ideal place. All that the earthly Jerusalem could do no more than symbolize will be reality."[528]

Secondly, the dimensions measured by the angel (Rev 21:15) reveal the staggering scale of God's city. It is set foursquare (Rev 21:16; cf. Zech 2:2) drawing on temple imagery (1 Kings 6:20) but I disagree with Mounce that this is the only influence.[529] As Aune demonstrates, these dimensions encapsulate the expectation in the ancient world of the perfect city.[530] Orthogonal patterns were common in cities of the Roman world[531] and it would make sense that this influences John as he further contrasts new Jerusalem's perfection with Babylon's façade.

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[524] For a recent detailed study of cosmic mountain ideology see L. Michael Morales, *"How Shall Ascend the Hill of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Leviticus"*, (Nottingham: Apollos, 2015).
[525] J. Vernon McGee, *Reveling through Revelation: part II, chapters 12-22*, (Los Angeles: Church of the Open Door, 1962), 104-105.
[526] Osborne, *Revelation*, 748; Metzger, *Breaking*, 100.
[527] Mounce, *Revelation*, 390.
[528] Bauckham, *Theology*, 133.
[529] Mounce, *Revelation*, 391-392.
[530] Aune, *Revelation*, 1160-1161. See also D.F. Watson, "Cities", 212-214.
[531] Watson, "Cities", 214.

A gated wall surrounds the city (Rev 21:12; 15; 17) and comes under scrutiny. Whether the measurement of Revelation 21:17 is in reference to width[532] or height[533] is not critical since "neither numerical accuracy or geometrical precision are needed to interpret this passage."[534] This cannot be said about the question of the walls purpose. While the wall operates as a symbol of security,[535] it is incoherent to suggest that the wall has a defensive purpose; evil has been overthrown (Rev 20:7-15; cf. 21:4)[536] meaning the gates can remain open (Rev 21:25). Fiorenza's suggestion is also problematic, arguing that the wall only "symbolizes the eschatological community of the church."[537] First, such distinction between wall and city is not required of the text. Neither is her conclusion that the difference in scale between wall and city "indicates that the universal cosmic salvation of the world by far exceeds that figured in the Christian community."[538]

Instead, it seems there is another crossover between OT imagery and the 1st century understanding of the perfect city. Cities of the Roman world often had gated walls signifying imperial triumph.[539] New Jerusalem expands this in a radically different way with the wall containing gates named after the sons of Jacob (Rev 21:12b), founded on the names of the twelve apostles (Rev 21:14). This has led Hock to argue that the walls "represent [God's] design for history and eternity."[540] Hock's point is verified when previous temple structures of the OT and second temple period are aligned with new Jerusalem.[541] Where there were walls in the temple to provide separation, there is only one wall delineating the place where God is with his people.[542] As such the wall of new Jerusalem pictures guaranteed security,

[532] Beale, *Revelation*, 1076-77;
[533] Osborne, *Revelation*, 753-754; Fanning, *Revelation*, 542.
[534] Smalley, *Revelation*, 552.
[535] J A Du Rand, 'The Imagery of the Heavenly Jerusalem', *Neotestementica* 22 (1988), 77.
[536] Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 568.
[537] Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 112.
[538] Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 112.
[539] Aune, *Revelation*, 1154.
[540] Hock, 'Babel', 114.
[541] Beale, *Revelation*, 1078.
[542] Beale, *Revelation*, 1078.

inclusive access to God's presence for all peoples and proclamation of his triumph in ordering salvation history.

Perhaps the most challenging dimension to comprehend is the 12,000 stadia (Rev 21:16) a size of around 1380 miles[543] to 1500 miles.[544] Are we to think of this literally or symbolically? According to Caird, "The measurements of the city show how much John cared for symbolism and how little he cared for mathematics."[545] Less flippantly, Mathewson calculates a perimeter for the city spanning 6000 miles (48,000 stadia)[546] and suggests that "John's measurements are primarily symbolical-theological rather than geographical or architectural."[547] Topham finds these numbers unrealistic and suggests a reconsideration of the received text.[548] This argument is unconvincing and seems founded on eisegesis rather than exegesis.

Although I agree in part with Mathewson's observations, I disagree that the measurement has no hint of geographical or architectural application. Two reasons suggest otherwise. First, part of the function of such large dimensions was to subsume the scope of the Roman world. Paul acknowledges this suggesting that the dimensions have Patmos as the point of origin (Rev 1:9b).[549] Whether that is true or not, it seems plausible that the large dimensions concern a space "large enough to accommodate the population of the Roman world in John's day with room to spare."[550] Such a crossover would act as an encouragement to the believers who were struggling in the age of Babylon (Rev 1:9a). Secondly, the language may be symbolic but there is no textual need for it to be purely symbolic. As Alexander argues "John's vision of the new Jerusalem foretells the future existence of a real

[543] Alexander, *City*, 150.
[544] Osborne, *Revelation*, 753.
[545] Caird, *Revelation*, 273.
[546] David Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21:1-22:5*, (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 107-108.
[547] Mathewson, *Heaven*, 109.
[548] Michael Topham, 'The Dimensions of the New Jerusalem', *ExpTim* 100 (1989), 417-419.
[549] Paul, *Revelation*, 350.
[550] Paul, *Revelation*, 350.

city on a real, but renewed, earth… dimensions may be symbolic… but they nevertheless convey something of the city's enormous size."[551] For Fanning, the dimensions make sense since "As the capital city and centre of the new creation, this city will have no equal in power or grandeur."[552] Fanning's suggestion has merit since it takes seriously the physical nature of the place where God and his people will meet in the new creation. Whether this is the capital city of the world cannot be explicitly defended from this passage. However, it would make sense of the trajectory begun in Eden.

Finally, the content of the city, the materials (Rev 21:11; 18-21), street(s)[553] (Rev 21:21; 22:2), river (Rev 22:1-2) and trees (Rev 22:2), come together to depict a place. The river (Rev 22:1-2) and trees (Rev 22:2) undeniably echo Eden. However, new Jerusalem should not be viewed simply as paradise regained. Instead it seems better to conceive of new Jerusalem as paradise enhanced and escalated[554] since God's purposes in human and non-human creation find their fulfilment in this place, a city.[555] Although symbolic, it would be unwise to consign these images of the city only to "spiritual and eternal truths which defy expression."[556] Physical place is clearly important, something which the makeup of the city suggests. As Gorman notes "This eschatological reality is not an *escape* from the materiality of existence but the very *fulfilment* of material existence."[557]

Note the materials used in the construction of the city (Rev 21:11; 18-21) which seem to suggest this. While a connection between the priestly breastplate (Ex 28:17-21) and the city of Jerusalem in Isaiah 54:11-12 can be seen, I suggest that these materials pick up an important thread going back further than either Exodus or Isaiah. Good gold is present in

[551] Alexander, *City*, 150.
[552] Fanning, *Revelation*, 541.
[553] Beale, *Revelation*, 1089.
[554] Bauckham, *Ecology*, 34-35.
[555] Bauckham, *Ecology*, 177.
[556] Smalley, *Revelation*, 553.
[557] Gorman, *Revelation*, 174. Italics original.

Havilah (Gen 2:11-12) and this bears striking resemblance to one of the main materials of new Jerusalem (Rev 21:18; 21b). Onyx is also present, but is not as prominent (Rev 21:20; Gen 2:12). A further point is worth raising in support of this reading from Ezekiel 28:12-13. Although the lament against Tyre has greater connection to Babylon (Rev 17:4; 18:16) there is also striking correlation to new Jerusalem's depiction. The echoes of "Eden, the garden of God" (Ezek 28:13a) are clear to see and read alongside Revelation 21:18-20. It suggests that what has been lost through the disobedience of Adam will be fully and finally restored.[558] It seems that the resources which were ready to be cultivated in light of the creation mandate (Gen 2: 11-12; cf. Gen 1:28) come to climactic and escalated fulfilment through God's provision of a physical city which reconciles God with humanity, and humanity with the entirety of creation.

While it is not possible to say with certainty that each of these images are exact blueprints for the city to come, they nonetheless express an expectation of a physical place which will unite the people of God in his presence. Rather than this being a creation *ex nihilo* the biblical narrative and the book of Revelation suggest a renewal which will take place at the consummation of God's kingdom. This renewal contains at its centre the city which has been expected since the patriarchal period (Gen 12:1-3; Heb 11:10) and will transform every aspect of human existence which has been warped since the fall (Gen 3:16-19; Rev 22:3-4). Since there is a great transformation, and there will be nothing accursed in the new creation, it seems misleading to argue that the city is an inherently evil concept in God's creation, "humanity's alternative to trusting the Lord".[559]

[558] Beale, *Revelation*, 1087-1088.
[559] Ellul, *City*, 1.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Rapid expansion of the global urban environment shows no signs of halting in the coming decades suggesting that it is important for the church and academy to consider the role and purpose of the city. It is therefore crucial to develop an understanding of the city which considers the text of scripture and allows what is written to inform our understanding. Numerous practitioners have sought to address the growth of cities throughout the world and their work has been helpful. However, there has been little extended writing from an exegetical or biblical theological perspective.

As such, this research has sought to develop a biblical theology of the city in the book of Revelation answering a question relating to the nature and role of the city in God's purposes. How we perceive the city affects our engagement with the motif in scripture and also the reality of urban growth in the world. From what we have seen throughout the canon, and more specifically in exegesis of particular texts in Revelation, a clearer picture develops. Rather than understanding the city as a place of inherent evil or an incidental sociological phenomenon which is gathering pace in the 21st century, the city should be seen as part of God's design for human life and the nexus of the eschatological future.

While Ellul's work is important it begins with the wrong point of origin. By starting with the city built by Cain (Gen 4:17), Ellul outlines a negative picture which is then bolstered by the building of Babylon (Gen 11:1-9) and the judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:1-29). Each of these instances contain negative elements and this must be taken seriously. However, as has been shown it is not the city which is being judged as evil. It is the inhabitants who vandalise the city and propagate this environment for numerous evil means. To say that the city is evil suggests that there are conclusions being drawn from the incorrect starting point.

I have argued throughout that cities find their origin in the mandate and resources provided at creation (Gen 1:28; 2:10-12). Rather than seeing the first city as a shady construction it should be seen as the outworking of a design hardwired into humanity, albeit tarnished. At various points across the canon God highlights the good of cities for humanity as places of refuge and the meeting point of heaven and earth. Even in the most difficult circumstances of Babylonian exile, the peace and prosperity of the city is the calling of the people of God. This suggests that the city is to be seen as a divinely designed worship centre, initiated by God and developed by humanity. It is the site where image bearing individuals seek security, prosperity, relationship and community, resulting in the creation of a culture which either glorifies God in Christ or exalts creation.

Nowhere in the Bible is this juxtaposition of urban realities more clearly set out than in the climax of the canon. Revelation is uniquely placed to address this question and exegetical discussion of both Babylon (Rev 17:1-18:24) and the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:1-22:5) show that the city is not inherently evil. Initially this may be surprising given the force with which Babylon is condemned. However, it is once again what the city has become which is the subject of judgement, a continuation of the biblical paradigm seen in Gen 11:1-9 and Gen 19:1-29. Rome sought to accumulate power and prestige through evil and inhumane means, such as the destruction of creation for excess and the commodification of human beings (Rev 18:11-13). Such power and influence intoxicates across the social strata and throughout the different peoples of the world. This city, and empire, are a worship centre directed toward creation, manipulating the heart and mind of its inhabitants.

For this reason there is a clear call to "come out" (Rev 18:4). Rome's agenda does not go unnoticed and is ultimately overthrown by the judgement of God. Culture, commodities, civilisation and cities are not antithetical to human existence. In fact they are a key component as we can see in new Jerusalem. However, the things which are the ground

for human good can very quickly become lucid stages on which sin is both displayed and broadcast as an alternative to God's rule of the cosmos. Cities have a unique capacity to multiply and disperse sin in a way that no other form of residence does. As this was a challenge for the 1st century churches in Asia minor, it remains so today. It is one of the reasons why it is essential to have an exegetically informed position on the city. Opportunities to compromise with an urban ideology arraigned against God's purposes is a commonplace. Expanding this point would be a good extension of this research and is something which could be pursued in a further study particularly in relation to economic globalisation and the role of digital communication.

The arrival of new Jerusalem at the climax of the canon is another detail which points in a positive direction. If the city were an inherently evil construct, a sociological development spinning out of control, it would be strange for God to reveal the eschatological consummation of his kingdom in urban language. It would also be out of step to have a cursed location in a place where there is no longer anything accursed (Rev 22:3). There is broad agreement that this climactic scene has particular focus on the people of God in the presence of God. I have argued that these people are those who have believed in Jesus Christ from among all the peoples of the world. Both textually and canonically this make sense, reversing the dispersion of the nations from Babylon (Gen 11:1-9). God's unmediated presence alters reality to such an extent that evil is dealt with, death dies, and there is such shining brilliance it seems as though there are no luminaries in the sky. A new and greater exodus has taken place, a form of Noahic salvation through judgement, which leads to the restoration of human beings with God.

As noted, such language and imagery is highly symbolic. However, the texts and the wider canonical narrative suggest that place is essential in understanding God's residence with his redeemed people. While it is not possible to say with certainty that the physical

reality described in these texts is exact, there is nonetheless a clear argument that the city *par excellence* is the intended outcome. I have argued that the arrival of new Jerusalem is God's gracious fulfilment of the mandate given in Eden (Gen 1:28). In a way similar to the renewal of the earth, this city will both align with our current expectations and also supersede them. Creation and creator live in harmony, and the peoples of the world dwell securely retaining distinctives of their own cultural uniqueness. As such it is fair to say that the city is better understood as divine design rather than an evil created by humanity which needs to be overcome.

An aspect which deserves more attention is the crossover between cities of the Greco-Roman world and the description of new Jerusalem. I have suggested that there is a correlation between the Greco-Roman ideal and new Jerusalem seen in the orthogonal layout of the city. If this is the case then it would be appropriate to consider to what extent urban planning along these principles is human ingenuity or the product of common grace. Here is another area where this current project could be expanded.

Cities are God's idea, and as such they should be viewed in a positive light by the church. Multiple people residing alongside each other with the potential to create, relate and worship together is a gracious realisation of the mandate given to Adam and Eve. Such positivity and eschatological optimism must not reject the tainted realism of urban challenges in the text or in the present for the global church of the 21st century. Nevertheless, there is an urban trajectory in salvation history which will bind together ecology, ethnicity, culture and worship around the God of salvation and the eternal gospel of the Lamb who was slain.

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