

New Jerusalem

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 May 2016

Preacher: Donald Macaulay

[0 : 00] Let's turn back then to the passage of scripture that we read, the book of Revelation, chapter 21. And we can read again at verse 5.

And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new. Also he said, Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.

And he said to me, It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. And so on. And particularly the words in the middle of verse 5, Behold, I am making all things new. I suppose the book of Revelation, for many, many people, is a book that they tend to avoid. And perhaps the reason why we tend to avoid it is because we find it extremely difficult to understand. And I suppose if one is completely honest, How honest can you be apart from completely?

[1 : 17] Then there are things in the book of Revelation that are perhaps impossible for us to understand. But nevertheless, we have to bear in mind that the writer of the book is writing to first century Christians.

And if they could not understand what he was writing about, Then it would seem to us that the writing would be a little bit pointless.

Surely one would think, after so many centuries of learning and studying and meditation, That by now we would have worked out what the book of Revelation is all about.

Well, you will find very different arguments from different people about the meaning of certain things in the book of Revelation. And some of these controversies I do not wish nor plan to enter into this evening.

For example, one of the biggest controversies that people have about the book of Revelation is who actually wrote it. Was it John the Apostle, the beloved disciple?

[2 : 37] John who we knew so well along with our Lord? Or was it a different John? There are those who maintain that it was a different John.

Personally, I don't think so. I think it's the exact same John as we find along with the disciples. It's the same John who seems to me to write the letters and also to write his gospel.

And I think that it is very, very clear from the beginning of the book that we see in chapter 1 and verse 9, Now we know from other writings of the time, we know that the apostle John was banished to Patmos during the reign of the emperor Domitian.

And that he was there for several years before he was allowed to return to Ephesus. It's a very interesting fact that out of the twelve apostles that were with our Lord during his lifetime, the only one who dies a natural death is John.

John is the only one who dies in old age. The church historian Eusebius tells us that well over his 95th year, that John was being carried into the church at Ephesus by the young men because he was no longer able to walk.

[4 : 30] But the revelation is given at a much earlier time period. It's probably given even before John writes his gospel, although again there's dispute about that.

And it's certainly before the letters. And John is given a vision that no one else, perhaps in New Testament times, has been allowed to see.

There are parallel visions in the Old Testament. We should not think that the revelation of John is unique.

Go to Isaiah chapter 60, and you will find a similar vision given to Isaiah. Look at the visions of Zechariah, and you will find similar things as well.

And from time to time, the Lord permits his people to see things, to have visions and to dream dreams, and to see things that others do not.

[5 : 38] And the vision that John sees is quite an amazing vision. But in many ways, it is a vision that we have to decipher.

It's written in a kind of code. And the code that is used would have cost, or would have not been difficult for John's disciples and the church at Ephesus, to whom it was probably written, to be able to understand.

Because the code is a numerical code. One of the things that you notice as you go through the book of Revelation, time and time again, is the use of numbers.

For example, even in the chapter that we read, you see that in verse 9, there are seven angels with seven bowls, with seven plagues. And you remember that at the beginning of the book of Revelation, we have seven churches.

Now, there were more than seven churches in Asia. There are certainly more than seven angels. And seven bowls and seven last plagues are symbolic.

[6 : 51] What does the figure seven represent? It is the perfection of God. Seven days in the week, the Lord created, God created in seven days.

And the figure seven throughout Scripture signifies God's perfection. It is the perfect number. But there are other numbers that are used as well.

You see frequently throughout the book, and we find it here again, in the description of the New Jerusalem, you find that the city has 12 angels, 12 tribes, 12 foundations, 12 names, 12 apostles. What was the significance of the 12? And again, you notice how everything in the New Testament links to the Old Testament. There are those who say nowadays that you don't need to bother with the Old Testament, that everything that you need is in the New.

Everything you need, perhaps in terms of salvation, may be in the New. But everything in the Old Testament points to the New, and the Old Testament is incomplete without the New, in the same way as the New Testament is incomplete without the Old.

[8 : 15] It's like they dovetail into each other. You can't understand one without the other. Try, for example, understanding the letter to the Hebrews without a knowledge of the Old Testament law, and you won't get very far.

What did the figure 12 represent throughout Scripture? Well, as I'm sure all brilliant mathematicians will tell you, 12, of course, is 3 times 4.

3 signifies the Trinity, and 4 is the universal number of the Church. And so we find these figures used symbolically throughout Scripture, but especially in the book of Revelation.

And as we come towards the end of the book of Revelation, various things have already taken place. You see in chapter 20, perhaps one of the most disputed chapters of the whole Scripture, you see what is called the Millennium, Satan being shut up for a thousand years.

And people debate whether that has actually happened or is still to happen, or so on. There are amillenniasts and postmillenniasts and premillenniasts.

[9 : 38] And if you're not familiar with that terminology, then I suggest it's time that you studied a little bit closer what the book of Revelation is all about. You are fortunate nowadays in that with access to the Internet, there are many wonderful study aids available and easily to look at.

But be careful of some of them. There are some that interpret Scripture according to their own interpretations rather than what is the correct interpretation.

Now, I suppose you're thinking, when I put it that way, you're thinking, well, there must be a correct interpretation. Yes, there is. There is a correct interpretation.

But not all of it is revealed to us. And it is very difficult to decide, for example, what the thousand years in chapter 20 actually means.

You'll find, for example, that the free church does not take a stand or a position on its meaning. Although the majority of free church ministers members and I presume members and I presume yourselves will be what we call a-millenniasts.

[10 : 52] We believe that the millennium is already taking place. But that really doesn't matter. It's inconsequential in a sense. What matters is what follows the millennium is the great white throne of judgment at verse 11 and we see who is seated on the throne.

And you remember that all this takes place after our Lord's second coming. There are so many things to put in place to be able to understand this chapter.

Our Lord has come, the dead have risen, the judgment has already taken place. And you see that in the verses from 11 down to the end of chapter 20.

We see in verse 14, for example, that death and hoids were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And again, people argue, is that symbolic? Is it an actual lake of fire or is it symbolism that is used?

Again, I'll leave you to make up your own mind on that. But there's no symbolism involved in the next verse. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

[12:05] And he wants a name not found written in the book of life. And the book of life and the opening of the books and the seals have been referred to earlier in the course of the book, the vision that John is given.

And you see that the person who is seated on the throne is the one who explains and tells John of this revelation and that he is making all things new.

And then John is given a vision of the new Jerusalem. The holy city, verse 2, 21, 2, I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Now that seems to us like a very strange expression. How can a city be prepared like a bride? But this is the symbolism that is used throughout scripture. How often do we have the relationship between Christ and his church spoken of in scripture as the relationship between the bride and the bridegroom?

[13:37] Go back to the Song of Solomon. Another piece of scripture that we very rarely hear people preaching on nowadays used to be common. It seems to have disappeared.

And that is what it's all about, the relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ and his church. look at the book of Judges, look at things that go on through into Isaiah, look and see how Israel is described time and time again as falling into adultery as she begins to worship idols.

That is why the ten tribes of the north are separated and carried off into captivity. And later on, of course, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin are taken into captivity to Babylon because of their idolatry.

And if you read the Old Testament prophets, time and time again, it is referred to as Israel committing adultery with false gods until God takes severe measures against them and brings Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the city of Babylon.

and the Jews are carried into captivity for 70 years. And notice again the symbolism, 70, 10 times 7.

[15:17] The Jews never worshipped idols again. It was in Babylon that they started the synagogues. But the Jews never fell into idolatry again.

and this is the process that has already begun here. A bride adorned for her husband. Paul speaks about it in Ephesians 5 as he speaks of the mystery of Christ and his church in the bands of the wedding vow.

And this is what we see that the Lord Jesus Christ himself is the bridegroom. He is the one who is sitting on the throne. And he is the one who now says behold the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God. Isn't that a wonderful promise for you and I to look forward to?

That that is the situation that we will have in eternity in the new Jerusalem. But it doesn't stop there. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more.

[16:45] Isn't that our greatest fear as human beings? The fear of death. You and I, all of us, know that we will die sooner or later.

death. But isn't it wonderful that Lord's people can face death in a totally different way? Isn't it wonderful that you and I are able to say that I have no fear of death.

Oh death, where is thy sting? Oh grave, where is thy victory? Oh I have a fear of the process of dying. That's a different thing. That's a different thing.

I don't know what the process of dying will be like. It's unknown to me, it's new to me, it may well be painful. But death itself is a glorious gateway to eternity.

That's how the Lord's people view and should view death. Oh it is a sad departing perhaps from those we leave behind. But nevertheless it is a glorious passing to be united with Christ for all eternity.

[18:01] At the wedding feast of the bride and the bridegroom when the church triumphant will take up its place in all eternity.

And you notice the preparation that is being made for you there. He who was seated on the throne said I am making all things new.

death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore. For the former things have passed away.

The former things have passed away. How much time do we spend speculating on what things will be like in eternity?

how much time do people spend wondering for example of what will I be like in my resurrected body? It's a pointless speculation.

[19 : 06] You and I have no idea what our resurrected body will be like except for the few clues that we may be given in scripture. And these are few and far between.

When we look at our resurrected Lord appearing to his disciples. Is that what you and I will be like? But you have to bear in mind of course that those are glorified bodies. We will have glorified bodies. Not just resurrected but glorified. And some people will argue and say well why do we need a body at all?

Surely the union of spirit and soul with the Lord Jesus Christ will be sufficient. Well you would think so. But it seems that there is a purpose for us in having resurrected bodies.

What that purpose will be people speculate. Some think it's like the first creation. That it's Adam and Eve all over again. that we will be looking after the new heavens and the new earth.

[20 : 17] And it's interesting isn't it that if you compare Genesis with Revelation there are certain things and certain parallels that you should notice. Scripture begins and ends with a creation.

Genesis opens with a creation. Revelation closes with a new creation. You notice that Genesis opened with sun, moon and stars being created.

But in Revelation there is no need for them. Why? Because the glory of God will lighten the city. And that's what we see from verse 22 onwards.

No temple in the city for its temple is the Lord God, the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it for the glory of God gives it light and its lamp is the Lamb.

God. There was something else you should notice in parallel from Genesis to Revelation. You notice that the devil, Satan, the old serpent operated in Genesis.

[21 : 41] He was there from the beginning ruining, trying to ruin God's creation, trying to bring about the fall of man. man. And didn't he just succeed so well?

So well. I wonder how often as you and I struggle with the guilt of our own sin, how often do we blame Adam and Eve?

And we think, ah, if it had been me, I wouldn't have fallen. I wouldn't have allowed myself to be tempted in that way. Wouldn't you?

If you hadn't been tempted in that way, you would have been tempted in some other way. And you would have fallen. You would have fallen. There's no point in blaming Adam and Eve and Eve until you look at yourself.

What has happened here? Satan is bound and he has been thrown now into the lake of fire. He will no more tempt the Lord's people.

[23 : 00] God's love. And you notice that there was a result of that in Genesis. Adam and Eve fled from the presence of God.

They hid from the presence of God. God. But what do we see restored now? We see full intimacy with God.

Full intimacy. We don't even need a temple anymore as we read for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. The throne in chapter 22 and 3 we see the throne of God and the Lamb will be in it and his servants will worship him.

They will see his face. face. No longer will we be looking through a glass darkly but we will see face to face as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 13.

And you remember how in the Garden of Eden the angel guarded the tree of life. The tree of life had to be guarded. But now there is full access to the tree of life.

[24 : 11] If you look a little further on in chapter 22 and 14 you find blessed are those who wash their robes so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

Full access. And what we see in Genesis is a paradise lost. But what we see in Revelation is a paradise regained.

A paradise regained. Behold I am making all things new. And so we see the new Jerusalem coming down.

And you notice that there are very interesting things in this new Jerusalem. Again of course we have to realize that this is not a real city.

This is a symbolic city. And symbolism is used so often in scripture. Look back for example at Ezekiel's temple. In the book of Ezekiel.

[25 : 23] It could never have been built because it was enormous. You can actually google it nowadays and you'll see 3D models of Ezekiel's temple which show you just the scale of it.

But if you look at the city here you see in its description things that are very very similar. A great high wall with 12 gates, 12 angels and on the gates the name of the 12 tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed.

And the wall of the city had 12 foundations and on them were the 12 names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb. Doesn't that tell you so clearly how the word of God is founded on the Old and the New Testament.

The foundation is in the Old Testament and the revelation is in the New. And notice that the city has gates.

12 gates. But I wonder if you've ever noticed the order of the gates is quite unusual. On the east, three gates, on the north, three gates, on the south, three gates, and on the west, three gates.

[26 : 42] We would normally go north, south, east, west, but the order is different. Why is that? That itself is a point of debate. Some think that it's because of the universal nature of the city.

But the thing that really matters is not the order. The thing that matters is that there are gates open in every direction. North, south, east, and west.

Although the order here is east, north, south, and west. In every direction there is access to the New Jerusalem.

Now that of course is symbolic again. by the time the New Jerusalem comes, we're told in verse 25 that its gates will never be shut by day and there will be no night there.

And you might wonder why do we need gates at all then? But verse 21 gives you the clue. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl.

[27 : 53] you remember the parable of the pearl of great price, the pearl of symbolic, of the beauty and the purity of scripture, of what the Lord Jesus Christ would do through the shedding of his blood to bring his people into his own holy city.

The symbolism runs through it all the time. look at the size of the city. From verse 15 onwards, the one who spoke with me, this is one of the angels, had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and its walls.

The city lies four square, its length the same as its width. It's a perfect cube. It's a perfect cube. And he measured the city with its rod, 12,000 stadia. And if you're using the ESV, you'll have a footnote there that tells you that's about 1,380 miles.

Let me put that in a distance that you can perhaps relate to a little better. That's a distance from London to Athens. Imagine a city that goes all the way from London to Athens in one direction and then is square and is also a cube.

[29 : 27] How can you imagine a city 1,380 miles high? It would reach away into the stratosphere. area. And so it becomes obvious to us that the size of the city again is symbolic.

What is the cube symbolic of? Go back to the tabernacle. Go back to the Old Testament. And what do you find?

That the Holy of Holies was a cube. And that the Holy of Holies was covered in pure gold. That the more you look at the building of the tabernacle in the Old Testament, you see its symbolism working from the inside outwards, from the perfect in the middle, in the most holy place, and in the Holy of Holies, through outward, you go from the best to baser things.

place. Why? Because the Holy of Holies, the altar, the cherubim, the mercy seat, all signified the presence of God with his people.

And you remember that in the Holy of Holies, the high priest entered once a year on the day of atonement, and that he had to enter with blood.

[31 : 03] There was no other way. There was no other way. It takes you back, does it not, to what happened to Adam and Eve.

You remember that when they were thrust out of the Garden of Eden, what did God do for them? He provided them with skins, with coats made of skins.

In order for skins and coats to be made, animals must have been killed. The shedding of blood was necessary. And from the very beginning of Scripture through to the cross, the symbolism of the blood is there at all times.

The writer to the Hebrews puts it this way and says that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin.

That's why the high priest had to go into the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement to sprinkle the mercy seat with blood.

[32 : 18] blood. And you remember of course that in order to do that, blood had to be shed. You remember also that the high priest had to remove his high priestly garments before entering in, that he entered in in plain linen.

linen. And you remember how Revelation tells us that fine linen is what the saints are clothed in. It was symbolic of holiness.

That's why he had as part of his dress the mitre saying holiness to the Lord. The parallels between the Old Testament and the New Jerusalem just become so clear for us as we look at it in detail.

And there's a further parallel. Look at the twelve stones that are in the foundation in verse nineteen onwards. I'm not going to read the list again. But allowing for the differences in translation from the Greek to the Hebrew, what you find is that the twelve stones are exactly the same as the stones in the breastplate of the high priest.

As he served the Lord, he wore the breastplate and he carried before him the twelve tribes of Israel. And these are the foundation of the new Jerusalem.

[33 : 57] You see, those who wish to do away with the Old Testament and to eliminate it from our considerations and from our worship don't understand its significance.

That is the foundation of the church. That is the foundation of God's word. It is as you study the old that you come to understand the new.

The two things go hand in hand. God's word. And each one of them focuses and brings us to look at who is speaking, who is constructing.

Verse 5, he who was seated on the throne said, behold, I am making all things true. Write this down for these words are trustworthy and true.

And he said to me, it is done. I am the alpha and the omega, the first and the last words of the Greek alphabet, the beginning and the end.

[35 : 13] And you notice in chapter 22 and verses 6 and 7, he repeats more or less the same thing. These words are trustworthy and true.

And the Lord, the Spirit, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place. Behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

Notice, not the revelation of this book, but the prophecy of this book. And he repeats it again, a little bit later on.

In verse 18, I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If our Lord himself is telling you that this is a prophecy, then, like every prophecy in scripture, it is infallible. It will happen. It will come to be. And there is a warning for you and I about this prophecy in chapter 22.

[36 : 25] In verse 18, I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.

And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city which are described in this book.

You see, you cannot just take out of scripture the bits that you like and discard the others. There are many people who do that nowadays.

There are many people who will tell you, oh, well, yes, Jesus, he was a good guy. He was a good teacher, et cetera, and so on. Great philosopher. But God?

No, I don't really accept that. How many other people look and fail to understand so many other things that we are told in scripture?

[37 : 36] The principles that God gives us to live by. God's moral law. Is it any coincidence that if you look throughout history, look at the rise and the fall of the great empires of history and you find

that first of all, there is a stage of moral decadence before the empires begin to collapse.

Rome is a great example. Isn't that what's happening in our own day and age? the great days of the British Empire have gone.

Perhaps some will say, thank goodness. But look at the moral decadence that has followed in our country ever since. And is it any surprise that as we move away from the principles of God's word, that things are getting worse and worse in our society?

our society teaches us to be selfish. Put me first. Self-esteem, self-this, self-help, self-that.

It's all about me. What does scripture teach us? It teaches us to put Christ first.

[39 : 12] It teaches us to be full of Christ's esteem. Isn't that what Paul says? No more me, but Christ in me.

As we consider these things in scripture, are there not lessons there for us in the way that you and I live our lives? Are we living out the principles of God's word?

God's love? And that is not just for believers, but for society in general. And as our society moves away from God's law, it's small wonder that we see the moral degradation that follows.

It's a cyclical pattern throughout history. you might find it interesting to consider the following, that the church where John worshipped until he died, the church of Ephesus, the church spoken about in the book of Revelation, the seven churches of Asia, the more than seven churches of Asia.

Asia in those days was Turkey, our modern Turkey. That there's hardly a believer left in Turkey nowadays.

[40 : 47] Where the church was strong, where its foundation was, it's disappeared. look through the church of the fourth and the fifth centuries, and what do you find?

The church in North Africa, the church in Alexandria have gone. There are remnants perhaps left. The Coptic church in Egypt still remains.

But what do you find is that the word of God and the spirit of the Lord is moving from place to place throughout history. look how long it was before the word of the Lord came with power, even to these islands.

It wasn't really until the 18th century, although there probably had been Columban missionaries here before. But the invasion of the Vikings eliminated Christianity from the islands.

was to be another 900 years approximately before it returns. Look how powerful it was, even here 50, 60 years ago.

[42 : 09] And look at it now. It's cyclical. The Lord's word moves and places in a cyclical way.

countries which had never heard the scriptures before are now the countries with most believers.

Look how the word of the Lord spread to the Americas, North and South America.

Look how it spread to parts of Africa. And look how it is spreading throughout Asia nowadays. Until what Jesus says in Matthew 23 will be fulfilled, that the word of the Lord will be published in all lands.

And remember that published doesn't necessarily mean in book form. There are ways now that people have scripture online and the internet, etc.

and so on, by mobile phone app. I don't know if you had a visit recently from Jill McKinnon who's working in Chad. And one of the most fascinating things that is happening in Chad is a WhatsApp translation of scripture into Arabic by which hundreds of people are being reached and in communication with the gospel in a way that was impossible not more than 20 or 30 years ago.

[43 : 39] Look at the spread of the gospel in China. Nepal and various other parts of the world. And we see how God is preparing his bride, preparing his church, even as he has done throughout scripture from the beginning, from the words of the Old Testament through to the end of the New, that he is making a people willing in a day of his power.

Behold, I make all things new. that is the picture that scripture gives us of what is to come.

Aren't those wonderful things to look forward to for God's people? If you are a believer this evening, this is the new Jerusalem that you have to look forward to as you will be adorned as a bride prepared for her husband.

No more pain, all tears wiped away. We could speculate so much on what that means, but yet isn't it a comforting thought to you this evening?

But you may be here this evening and thinking, no, it's not comforting for me at all. I have no security that I will be part of this.

[45 : 14] I feel that I am more likely to be among those who are cast into the lake of fire. Or there are times when even the believer feels that insecurity.

The message of Scripture is clear. Come to the cross. There is no other place where your assurance can be given more than to come to the cross of Christ.

To see the blood that was shed, the blood that is symbolized in the covenant from the beginning of Scripture, right through to the end.

And especially look at the one who shed his blood for you. That you might have redemption and faith and assurance and be adopted into the family of God.

That's what it's all about. Or it sounds so simple. It sounds so easy.

[46 : 34] And yet many of us can testify that it was one of the hardest things that we had to do. How do we come to faith?

how do we put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ? Well, even the book of Revelation tells you that. Jesus himself says, behold, I stand at the door and knock. And he is standing at the door of your heart this evening and knocking. and he says and promises that if any man open, I will come in and sump with him.

But you see, there is a responsibility there for you too. He does the knocking. And if you're here this evening, he is knocking at the door of your heart.

heart. But you are the one who has to open. You are the one who has to open. But the promise is that once you open, he will never leave nor forsake you.

[47 : 54] Isn't that a wonderful promise for you this evening? A wonderful promise for the Lord's people. That he will never leave nor forsake you until he takes you in to glory and to this new Jerusalem.

Let us pray.