

TRANSFORMATION OF SYMBOLS: REV. 21:1-22:5

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Inability to understand the significance of the Land for Jewish identity is a frequent barrier to dialogue. Among the causes of such incomprehension is the use of Land-related issues in the Christian tradition itself, beginning with the Christian scriptures. Rev. 21:1-22:5 is a case in point.

In this material John has used Jerusalem, the Temple, and the People to describe his understanding of the eschatological hope. He has used biblical materials as well as Second Temple and post-Second Temple images to portray an eschatological vision from the perspective of the Christ experience.

John has used these materials in a mythic context, as the final conclusion to his great drama of the struggle between good and evil. He has done so in response to his community's need to resolve the conflict between what ought to be and what is -- between the community's self-understanding as elect and faithful (to varying degrees!) and the experience of persecution by Rome and -- to a lesser extent -- the opposition of the non-messianic Jewish community. John has accomplished his goal through the transformation of a symbol system which was originally based on a national hope centered in the people Israel, to an expectation which is completely universalist and focused in the Christ experience.

BABYLON

- 7th bowl - destruction of Babylon (16:17-21)
- Approach of one of 7 angels with 7 bowls (17:1)
- Invitation - "Come, I will show you" (17:1)
- The great harlot (17:1)
- Translation of seer by angel (17:3)
 - to a wilderness (17:3)
- The woman Babylon is "arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations, the impurities of her fornication" (17:4)
- Dwelling place of demons and unclean spirits (18:2)
- Kings of earth will strip Babylon of her finery (17:15-16)
- Dwelling of unclean spirits (18:2)
- Those not written in the book of life "will marvel to behold the beast" (17:8)
- Babylon doomed to destruction (18:8)

NEW JERUSALEM

- 7th unnumbered vision - descent of Jerusalem (21:1-8)
- Approach of one of angels with 7 bowls (21:9)
- Invitation - "Come, I will show you" (21:9)
- The bride, the wife of the Lamb (21:9)
- Translation of Seer by angel (21:10)
 - to a "great, high mountain" (21:10)
- The bride-wife Jerusalem has "the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal" (21:11)
- Dwelling place of God (21:22)
- Kings of nations will come bringing glory and honor (21:24, 26)
- Nothing profane will enter her (21:27)
- Those written in the book of life enter the New Jerusalem (21:27)
- Saints will rule forever (22:5)