

Kingdom Report

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Week of 23 August 2025

The Mystery of the 24 Elders and the Church as New Jerusalem

I want to do a series on a new vision of the Biblical pattern for the church of the 21st Century. A good place to start is to explain the mystery of the 24 elders of Revelation. And from there find the pattern for the future from the Old Testament Ekklesia of David.

There is a common longing especially in the Charismatic Evangelical church to find a way through either teaching or revival to get back the church of the Book of Acts. As the original church to be emulated. I applaud the sentiment.

However let me offer a new vision for the church of the 21st century. We all agree that Jesus said “I will build my Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” What we are looking for are the building plans for the design of the building. We recognize that this has been a structure under construction for 2000 years. Our problem is that we are left with the nagging feeling that we somehow we lost the plan of the construction back in the 1st century.

I offer a different view I would like to propose in this series of the what the church of the 21st century will look like. I make several assumptions.

- first is the belief that Jesus Christ is still the head of the church and though the construction site looks messy at times the building is still under His construction.
- secondly I believe that the pattern is set in heaven and as God commanded Moses to build the Tabernacle according to the pattern he saw in heaven, so we will find the pattern in scripture.
- thirdly I believe that John saw the pattern of the church of the 21st century in heaven and called it “the New Jerusalem”.
- fourthly John gave us a clue where to get the construction guidance in scripture when he saw “24 elders around the throne”. He was clearly alluding to Old Testament scripture reference for the pattern.

Before examining the scripture clues and what the story they tell us let me say this as background.

I am busy with my book “Ekklesia: The Church that heals the nations”. What I want to do over a series of blogs is to give you some of my research conclusions on where I believe the Lord is leading His Church of the 21st Century.

Whenever you talk about designing a building there is an old adage that says “form follows function”. Jesus is not building a church to take it out of this world so that the antichrist can rule the world. He prayed Father I pray that you not take them out of this world but protect them from the evil one” (John 17). So I believe He is building a church from generation to generation to carry His glory into all the world, to heal the nations and to crush the head of Satan.

So what does John see in Revelation that Jesus is building? Answer: The New Jerusalem.

And the pattern he saw in heaven is what we will see on earth. “The habitation of God”. The place where God will manifest His presence among the nations.

Which brings us to the 24 elders and the clue to the pattern in heaven and on earth.

The twenty-four elders first appear in Revelation 4:4, described as seated on thrones surrounding God's throne, "dressed in white and [having] crowns of gold on their heads". Throughout Revelation, these figures consistently engage in worship, falling down before the throne and casting their crowns at God's feet. They hold golden bowls full of incense, which are explicitly identified as "the prayers of God's people", indicating their priestly function in the heavenly sanctuary

The elders appear in multiple passages throughout Revelation (chapters 4, 5, 7, 11, and 19), consistently portrayed as beings of authority and spiritual significance. Their white garments symbolize righteousness, their golden crowns indicate victory and reward, and their thrones represent shared authority with Christ.

The interpretive key to understanding the twenty-four elders lies in 1 Chronicles 24, where King David organized the Aaronic priesthood into twenty-four courses or divisions. This organizational structure was divinely ordained.

The number twenty-four appears consistently throughout Scripture in contexts related to priestly service and worship. Beyond the priestly divisions, 1 Chronicles 25 records that the temple musicians were also organized into twenty-four divisions. This systematic approach to worship reflects God's desire for order, continuity, and comprehensive participation in His temple by all manner of people apart from priests.

And here is where the clue to the pattern in heaven leads us to the pattern on earth.

The books of Chronicles were written by Ezra the scribe and priest.

Ezra was sent on a mission by God (and the Persian king) in the year 458 BC to build the New Jerusalem and teach and train a new priesthood and the people how to be God's people in as a witness to the Persian empire.

Ezra wrote the books of Chronicles to give a history lesson to the discouraged

remnant in the new colony trying to rebuild Jerusalem how it used to be and how to follow the pattern laid down by king David for Temple practice, Temple worship, the laws of the Lord for how to operate God's government and God's kingdom on earth.

So when John saw a vision of a New Jerusalem coming to earth.....he was saying look to the last time God started a New Jerusalem project and how it was structured and organized, how it was built. That would be the New Jerusalem built after the fall of Babylon in 539 BC. And incidentally the New Jerusalem in Revelation is also manifested after the fall of Babylon in Revelation.

Before we go to Ezra and Chronicles let me just give some history as to why 458 BC and Ezra's mission was prophetically critical to prophecy of the coming Messiah. When the angel Gabriel told Daniel a decree to rebuild the city and temple would be made and 70 weeks of years (Daniel 9:23-27) from that date would be the time that the Messiah would fulfill His mission. 458 BC plus 490 years comes to 33 AD and the death and resurrection of the Messiah and the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom on earth.

So look at Ezra's mission as to build a New Jerusalem to be a witness to the nations to prepare them for the coming of the Messiah. Can you see why this is important for us today? Why the Church needs to be built with Ezra's guiding pattyern as the New Jerusalem for preparing for the Messianic kingdom manifestation on earth.

Background:

The city of Jerusalem and the Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 B.C., and except for a small number, most of the Jews were forcefully deported to Babylon where they were enslaved for 70 years. The first deportation was in 603 BC. At the end of those 70 years they were granted permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, as well as to build the walls around the city. This return migration occurred in three main groups:

1. Group led by Zerubbabel: this group of 49,897 people returned in 534 B.C. (Ezra 2:64-65).

2. Group led by Ezra: the second group of 1,754 returned in 458 B.C. (Ezra 8:1-20).

Zerubbabel dedicated the new temple in 515 B.C., so Ezra's group arrived around 57 years after the temple's dedication, and what they found was that spiritual reform was desperately needed (Ezra 9:1-2).

3. Group led by Nehemiah: this group returned in 444 B.C. with an unknown number of people, accompanied by soldiers (Nehemiah 2:9-10).

Ezra was an exceptional priest living in Babylon, having a thorough knowledge of the Law of Moses. God favored him by moving the heart of the Persian king to allow him the honor of leading another group of Jews to Jerusalem. Ezra's

mission was different from Zerubbabel's (building of the temple) and Nehemiah's (building of the walls around Jerusalem). Ezra's mission had six objectives:

1. To inquire of the spiritual conditions of Jerusalem and Judah (Ezra 7:14).
2. To carry a donation from the king to Jerusalem. This also included a freewill offering which was given by the people (Ezra 7:15-20).
3. To check on and maintain the Temple of God (Ezra 7:21-24).
4. To appoint magistrates and judges (Ezra 7:25).
5. To teach the Law of Moses (Ezra 7:25).
6. To execute judgment (Ezra 7:26).

Spiritual Climate of Jerusalem

Between the time the first group arrived in Jerusalem and when Ezra's group arrived, around 80 years had elapsed. There had been a time of great rejoicing immediately following the dedication of the temple in 515 B.C., but in just one generation things had changed dramatically.

Upon Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem, after his 4-month journey from Babylon, he found that the social, moral, and religious climate was appalling. The sins of the people included

Ezra's Mission and the Church Mission

Ezra's task was multifaceted—reformation through teaching the Torah, purifying the priesthood, and reorganizing communal life (Ezra 7:10; 9-10). He modeled zealous repentance, confessing national sin and leading the people in covenant renewal (Ezra 9:5-15; Neh. 8:1-8). Critically, Ezra drew upon King David's template from 1 Chronicles to restructure the temple and city. David had centralized worship in Jerusalem, organizing priests into 24 courses for orderly service (1 Chron. 24), Levites for support roles (1 Chron. 23-26), and administrative divisions for governance (1 Chron. 27). This was no antiquarian exercise; it ensured perpetual holiness and influence, positioning Jerusalem as a "city set on a hill" to testify God's sovereignty to surrounding nations (Ps. 48:2; Isa. 2:2-3).

The purpose? To make the rebuilt Jerusalem and temple a cultural and religious conduit, influencing the Persian empire with Yahweh's ways. As a theocratic enclave, Israel was called to embody justice, mercy, and monotheism amid polytheistic imperialism (Deut. 4:5-8). Ezra's reforms—enforcing Sabbath observance, tithing, and separation from idolatry—aimed at this missional outreach, echoing God's promise that nations would stream to Zion for instruction (Mic. 4:1-2). Through faithful obedience, the remnant could heal imperial wounds, much as Daniel and Esther had influenced Persian courts earlier.

This narrative instructs us: Discouragement in exile-like conditions is not terminal but an invitation to divine rebuilding. For the 21st-century church, facing secularism, moral relativism, and global crises like climate change and AI ethics, Ezra's story calls us to a long-haul faithfulness, spanning generations.

New Jerusalem represents the redeemed community: its gates inscribed with the twelve tribes, foundations with the apostles (Rev. 21:12-14), signifying covenant continuity. Its radiance, like jasper and pure gold, evokes God's glory filling the earth (Hab. 2:14), with no temple needed because God Himself is the sanctuary (Rev. 21:22).

Crucially, this city heals the nations: "The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 22:2), reversing Eden's curse and Babel's division

Paralleling Ezra, the church today embodies this New Jerusalem—already but not yet fully realized (Heb. 12:22-24). Just as Ezra rebuilt using David's template amid empire, the church must reorganize for endurance, influencing the "empires" of globalization, capitalism, and digital culture. Amid projected population shifts, economic inequalities, and spiritual awakenings in the Global South, the church's role is to manifest heaven's reality on earth, healing nations through gospel proclamation and cultural engagement.

Ezra's use of David's template offers practical imperatives for the 21st-century church.

1) First, spiritual reformation through Scripture and worship.

Ezra prioritized Torah teaching and temple purity (Ezra 7:10; Neh. 8). Similarly, the church must renew biblical literacy and Spirit-empowered worship, countering secular distractions. In an era of digital fragmentation, local congregations should organize "courses" like David's—rotational ministries for prayer, discipleship, and outreach—ensuring perpetual vitality. This could foster resilient networks of house churches and megachurches alike, modeling unity amid diversity.

2) Second, communal purification and unity

Ezra addressed intermarriage as covenant compromise (Ezra 9-10), calling for separation without isolation. For us, this means confronting syncretism—blending Christianity with consumerism or nationalism—while engaging culture redemptively. Evangelical voices urge the church to reclaim the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28), shaping arts, education, and media as "temples" of influence. Imagine Christian creatives in Hollywood or Silicon Valley, infusing stories with gospel hope, healing societal divisions.

3) Third economic and political stewardship.

David's administrative structures integrated faith with governance (1 Chron. 27). Ezra adapted this for imperial context, using Persian resources for temple rebuilding. Today, the church must influence economies ethically: advocating fair trade, debt relief, and sustainable practices that reflect Jubilee principles (Lev. 25). By 2050, amid AI-driven job displacement, churches could pioneer vocational training and microfinance, creating "Christian economies" that prioritize human flourishing. Politically, like Ezra's magisterial appointments

(Ezra 7:25), believers should serve in government, promoting justice without theocracy, influencing policies on life, family, and environment.

4) Fourth, missional outreach to empires.

Ezra's reforms positioned Jerusalem as a light to Persia. The church, as New Jerusalem, heals nations by exporting gospel values—compassion, integrity, reconciliation—into global systems. In the 21st century, this means partnering with NGOs for poverty alleviation, leveraging technology for evangelism, and fostering interfaith dialogue while upholding Christ's uniqueness. A revitalized church could catalyze a "Christian civilization," not through dominance but servanthood, transforming cultures from individualism to community and economies from exploitation to stewardship.

Ezra had to build a New Jerusalem that the angel's message to Daniel said had to stand for 500 years of faithful witness to the nations until Messiah comes. We have similar task ahead of us. How about we build a church to be an itinerant witness for the next 75 years till 2100 and see if as I expect...the meek will inherit the earth.