

Newsletter March 2019

In this Newsletter, we find that our ongoing study begun two years ago this very month has now brought us to Chapter 22, the very last chapter in the Revelation, which is also the very last chapter in the Bible. It contains the final words of Christ to his people, thus adding further weight to his statements. Again, we need to emphasize, as we did last month, that much of the text we are studying is so otherworldly that we must be satisfied to accept it exactly as written – being careful to avoid any exegesis that could distort its true and exact meaning through human interpretation. What John has been seeing and hearing is not esoteric symbolism, but represents a true and faithful look at eternal reality, which he recorded in this great document for our edification of the new creation within this present age.

In summary, we discovered that there will be no physical Temple located within the New Jerusalem. Within the old earthly Jerusalem, the Temple had been its sacred centerpiece. Within its “Holy of Holies,” the projected glory of God’s presence had once dwelt. Here, God is actual and his glory is actual, not merely a projected presence. Therefore, in this new eternal era, mankind’s fellowship with God will no longer be attained through the formality of a man-made physical Temple, nor will it anymore be gained through shadowy symbols, rituals, and ceremonies – God the Father and Christ the Lamb constitute the Temple of the New Jerusalem. Inasmuch as God has there set up his permanent habitation with a fully redeemed mankind, fellowship and communication with God in this new era will be quite personal and intimate, directly conducted face-to-face, God to man and man to God (cf. Re.22:4).

We find that God’s throne, repeatedly referred to as the “throne of the Father and the Lamb,” is established at the very heart of the city; therefore, it is its central feature replacing the Temple that was found in the old earthy Jerusalem. It is quite significant that Jesus Christ is repeatedly referred to as the Lamb in these verses. For, Jesus is the “Lamb of God” that has taken away the sins of the world through his sacrificial death on the cross at Calvary. In this New Jerusalem, we see Christ risen and glorified, yet still referred to as the Lamb, thus eternally identifying Him with the atonement that He had achieved for the redemption of his people. Through his suffering and shed blood, Jesus has made this permanent cohabitation of God and mankind possible.

We shall now continue on in our study by turning to the text of Chapter 22, as John, led by one of the seven angels, continues his tour of the New Jerusalem:

“And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb (Re.22:1).

Up until this point everything in the New Jerusalem has been presented as being made of hard stationary material substances. Now the angel shows John a moving river consisting of the “water of life” that proceeds out of God’s majestic throne. This is not ordinary water, consisting of two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen, as we know it here on earth, but a supernatural “living water.” While upon the earth, Jesus spoke of this living water to a woman He had met at Jacob’s well: “Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water” (Jn.4:10). When the woman confused this living water with ordinary well water, “Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (Jn. 4:13,14). Therefore, this river of water proceeding from the throne of God can be likened to the Holy Spirit who flows forth from the Father and the Son to quicken, nourish, and sustain redeemed mankind’s soul in this life upon this present earth. Here, within this new creation, this supernatural living water is tangible, touchable and drinkable by the redeemed. In keeping with the overall transparency of this city, this living water is as clear as crystal, which depicts its purely spiritual quality.

“In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, *was there* the tree of life, which bare twelve *manner* of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations” (Re. 22:2).

All along the street leading from the throne, and on either side of the river of life that flowed from it, grew the tree of life. The old Eden of earth was a garden of trees. The tree of life had been made abundantly available to Adam within it, until access to the garden was later denied to him and all his future descendants following his grievous fall into sin. Thereafter, mankind’s way to eternal life was heavily guarded by two powerful cherubim

each wielding a flaming sword of judgment, keeping the way undefiled and protected for a future redeemed race (cf. Ge.3:22-24). Consequently, death loomed over and eventually befell every man from Adam on – until eternal life was granted to the sanctified followers of Christ. Here in this heavenly Eden, we are told that the tree of life grows in great abundance. It perpetually yields twelve different kinds of fruit. While the fruit of the tree provides nourishment of eternal life for the individual man, the leaves of the tree were intended as a balm for the healing of the nations on earth so that they could exist in a perpetual state of righteousness. All of that which was denied mankind after Adam’s fall into sin will now be restored to the nations upon the New Earth.

“And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name *shall be* in their foreheads” (Re.22:3,4).

Notable by its apparent absence is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In the New Heavens and the New Earth, there will be no sin possible, and the previous curse of death for sin will be no more. Although the Holy Spirit is not mentioned here, He will indwell all who live within or enter this heavenly city. The throne of God and of the Lamb, located within the New Jerusalem, will therefore be readily accessible to all of redeemed mankind. Here in this verse we find saints that are referred to as the “servants of God” who serve before the throne, and along with that service we find that a great privilege has been granted them. No mortal man can look upon the face of God and live, but as we have discovered, within this new creation, the curse of death is no more, having been cast away into the lake of fire. Mortal man has fully put on immortality and now resides in incorruptible flesh, which is well suited for life in this eternal heavenly realm. Of course, to see the face of Christ is also to look upon the face of the Father, and we shall certainly see Christ as He is; but, in a way that is beyond our present understanding, immortal man will actually be able to see the face of the Father, who is a spirit, and come to know Him as He truly is – for “his name shall be in their foreheads.”

There is some question regarding the previous earthly identity of those who serve here before the throne. Most certainly the Church, as Christ’s beloved wife, who is forever present at his side, will adore and worship Christ in this New Jerusalem, but she will not minister before the throne as do the servants we find here. We have read earlier that a remnant of devout Jews had the name of the Father and the Son imprinted in their foreheads: “Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads” (Re. 14:1). It is most likely therefore that the servants who serve here before the throne are the same sealed Jews that had earlier served Him on earth through their powerful witness of the Gospel. Many other Jews, having been redeemed during the Millennium, will likely bolster their ranks from their habitation upon the New Earth.

“And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever” (Re.22:5).

Unlike upon the old earth, there will be no sun needed to illuminate this city or the earth, for God’s glory will illuminate the entire creation from within the Holy City. Again, we read that there is no night, no darkness, to be found anywhere within the New Jerusalem, nor for that matter upon the New Earth, which will be infused by it. Thus, it will not be necessary to carry a candle or some device to light ones way, for the Lord God fully lights their way. God gives mankind his light within themselves such that there can be no shadows surrounding the redeemed. The glorified residents of this new creation will reign with the Lord God forever in his divine light.

“And he said unto me, These sayings *are* faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done” (Re. 22:6).

All of this is hard for the mortal mind to process. For that reason, the angel again assures John that all he has seen and heard are faithful and true; none of this is a mere figment of John’s imagination. It is not only true, but God is also faithful to carry everything out exactly as it is stated in this Revelation. It was God the Father, who is so identified as the “Lord God of the holy prophets,” who had sent the angel to inform his many servants, through John’s written record, about the things “which must shortly be done.”

“Behold, I come quickly: blessed *is* he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book” (Re.22:7).

At this point in the heavenly vision, John hears the voice of the glorified Christ assuring him that He is truly coming again, and that when He does, He will come quickly. His coming will be as sudden and unexpected as a

thunder clap that will echo over the entire earth in a mere moment of time. He also reassures John regarding all of the things he had seen, heard, and had written down by saying, “blessed *is* he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.”

“And I John saw these things, and heard *them*. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See *thou do it not*: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God” (Re.22:8,9).

Having heard the voice of the glorified Christ, John fell down to worship before the feet of the angel that had shown him all these things. Again, the angel admonished John not to ever do that; we must always take care to direct our worship to God alone, for all else is idolatry. As amazing as an angel may appear to mortal men, they are nevertheless created beings, as are we. They are fellow-servants of God as are John’s brethren, the apostles; the prophets of old; and all true believers who keep the sayings of this book of the Revelation.

“And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still” (Re. 22:10,11).

Unlike the prophecy of Daniel, which God had ordered to be sealed until a future age in which it could be understood, the Revelation was not to be sealed, for the time in which its prophecy was to begin to be fulfilled was “near at hand” – even at the door within this present age. Therefore, everything about this prophecy is presented as an open book to all those who can and will accept it exactly as it is written. Nothing recorded in this book is subject to future revision or change over time. The unjust, which are spoken of here, will remain unjust; and those who are spoken of as filthy (Greek, *rhupoo* = morally dirty) will remain filthy. Likewise, the righteous man will remain righteous, and the one who is holy will remain holy – for God has ordained all of this to be so. All will and must remain exactly as they are depicted in this book by the sovereign will and foreknowledge of God, as this prophecy begins to unfold in the near future.

“And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward *is* with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (Re:12,13).

Here Jesus reiterates that He will surely come quickly (cf. Re. 22:7), not slowly or with hesitation. At that time He will reward every redeemed man according to the work that he or she has accomplished on his behalf while they had sojourned upon the earth. Early in the Revelation, John had quoted Jesus as saying, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty” (Re.1:8). This was actually stated here by the eternal Christ as the Revelation had come to an end.

“Blessed *are* they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Re. 22:14).

As we previously saw, the gates to the city are each named for one of the twelve tribes as their entrance into the new Jerusalem. Therefore, those who are referred to here, that obey his commandments and enter through the gates into the city, are redeemed Jews. They will make periodic visits to the New Jerusalem from their home cities upon the New Earth to gain access to God’s throne. These cities will be arranged on the new earth, corresponding to the location of their own particular gate, as were their wilderness camps around the Tabernacle.

“For without *are* dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie” (Re.22:15).

“Dogs” was the common term used by Jews for unbelieving Gentiles. The description given here characterized the people of the Gentile nations that had desired to destroy them. Of such were the Assyrians and the Babylonians that had killed many and taken others captive to serve them as slaves. This verse serves to assure the redeemed Jew that none such as these can ever again harm them or ever enter to destroy this New Jerusalem. As we have seen, all sorcerers, whoremongers, murderers, idolaters, and liars will now be far removed from the city; they are forever suffering for their evil deeds within the lake of fire.

“I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, *and* the bright and morning star” (Re.22:16).

At this moment, the angel apparently departs and the vision ends. The glorified Christ again appears before John as he again finds himself on the isle of Patmos where his amazing spiritual journey had begun. Jesus

certifies to John that He had sent the angel, who had guided him, as his personal envoy to testify to him of all these future things – so that John could in turn testify and make them evident to all the churches. Today, we of the contemporary church are also edified by the reading of the document that John had recorded, as he had been directed. Jesus then certifies to John that He is “the root and the offspring of David;” that is, He is the Messiah that Israel had so long-awaited. This identifies Him with the chosen people of Israel of old. He is also “the bright and morning star” that signals a new day. This new day had begun with the new covenant that was written in his own blood. He is a great light unto the Gentiles, their Emanuel, who had walked among them, and through his death and resurrection He had redeemed them as his very own beloved bride, the Church of his own body.

“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Re. 22:17).

The “Spirit” here refers to the Holy Spirit, who first revealed our sin to us, and then called us to come unto Jesus Christ, who alone is the way, the truth, and the life eternal. Likewise, the bride, his Church, bears witness through the Gospel for men to come. Finally, “let him that heareth say, Come.” Not only is this an open invitation for those that hear to come, but shall through their personal witness invite still others to come along with them. Even here, we find that not all who hear will come. Only the poor in spirit, who have a deep thirst for a divine righteousness that they cannot themselves appropriate, will hear this three-fold invitation to come; all those that heed the divine call will come to Christ and will be allowed to freely drink of the water of life that flows from the eternal throne.

“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book” (Re.22:18,19).

Jesus here issues a stern warning to all who read this Revelation and fail to heed its words as fully-settled divine prophecy – the very Word of God that cannot be ignored, added to, or altered in any way. First, we are warned not to add anything beyond that which God has revealed within this document, lest He place upon those that would do so all of the plagues spoken of in this prophecy. This is why we must always accept a literal interpretation of this Revelation, being very careful not to add to it through allegorical applications, which distorts the intended meaning of the text. Likewise, we must not ignore, remove or disregard any part of this prophecy as unimportant. We must study it in its entirety within its context, not omitting any part of it. For, those who would take away from this prophecy will have no place in the book of life. It is not that their names will be blotted out of the book of life; rather, those that would do this are those whose names have never been written in the book of life. They have no future hope for a place in the Holy City, nor do they have any hope in all the other blessings written in this Revelation. They, through personal choice, want no part in them and so cannot receive them.

“He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen” (Re.22:20,21).

John now closes this document with his own final words of testimony to the churches which he has faithfully shepherded from the home church of Ephesus – and to us in this age as well. He reiterates and assures them and us that Jesus, who has testified to the truth and faithfulness of all the things found in this document, has emphatically promised, “Surely I come quickly.” John adds his own assurance that this is so with his own “Amen,” and looking forward to that day John then prays, “even so come Lord Jesus.”

”Finally the Apostle John adds his own closing benediction, which was intended for those believers in the seven churches at the end of the first century. However, as fellow believers within this current age, who have the written record of this vision, and along with them have read and understood this document, we are likewise blessed by John’s closing words: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen.”

Having finished our study of this great document, it seems appropriate to close with these words of invitation by our Lord taken from Revelation 2:7, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”

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