

BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson 51 - Chapter 22

Today we begin the final chapter of Revelation; and perhaps since our exciting journey has taken us over a year, we need to be reminded of a few important points. The first is that while Revelation is usually seen as a book that is all about endings, in fact it is a book about new beginnings. Second is that from the 30,000 foot view, Revelation is a call to holiness for God's people. And why should God's people be holy?

CJB Leviticus 20:26 *Rather, you people are to be holy for me; because I, ADONAI, am holy; and I have set you apart from the other peoples, so that you can belong to me.*

The Apostle Peter expands upon Moses by saying:

CJB 1 Peter 1:14-16 ¹⁴ *As people who obey God, do not let yourselves be shaped by the evil desires you used to have when you were still ignorant.* ¹⁵ *On the contrary, following the Holy One who called you, become holy yourselves in your entire way of life;* ¹⁶ *since the Tanakh says, "You are to be holy because I am holy."*

This call to holiness is so that people willingly belong to God and ultimately receive the benefit of salvation as their reward. Third, as Peter touches on, John's Apocalypse calls God's people to obedience; something that has nearly evaporated from our Christian institutions because obedience is now classified in the Church as akin to oppression. While these two purposes are highlighted at least a dozen times in chapter 22 alone, these were also the prevalent thoughts in the letters to the 7 "Churches" in Asia.

Fourth is that Revelation consistently calls for Christ's followers to persevere and to remain faithful to the end so that this promised salvation will be their inheritance. Fifth, God is to receive all the glory for every aspect of Creation and Re-Creation, and for providing a means of redemption for those who love Him, as well as the justice of condemnation for those who don't.

Another crucial point is one we recently examined but needs to be revisited in more detail. It is that beginning with Revelation chapter 17 and carrying on through the final words of this book, we have a strong contrast developed between two representative cities: wholly unclean Babylon and fully pure New Jerusalem. This relationship is demonstrated by the nearly identical, neatly woven phrase used to introduce each of these cities.

CJB Revelation 17:1 *Then came one of the angels with the seven bowls; and he said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great whore who is sitting by many waters.*

CJB Revelation 21:9 ⁹ *One of the seven angels having the seven bowls full of the seven*

last plagues approached me and said, "Come! I will show you the Bride, the Wife of the Lamb."

G. K. Beale did a masterful job of listing several of the contrasting characteristics of these two cities and I'll borrow directly from some of it.

1) The citizens of the two cities have contrasting names written on their foreheads. Of Babylon we read: ⁵ ***On her forehead was written a name with a hidden meaning, BAVEL THE GREAT MOTHER OF WHORES AND OF THE EARTH'S OBSCENITIES*** ^{CJB} Rev. 17:5. But of the New Jerusalem we read: ***The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him; ⁴ they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.*** ^{CJB} Rev. 22:3-4. This characteristic is, to me, the most important. It confronts the issue of identification. That is, humans in all ages have been given a grand total of two choices to identify with, and only two: Babylon or New Jerusalem. The world or Heaven. Satan or God. Evil or righteousness. While there are people in every era that have attempted to straddle the wide canyon between those choices, and none more so than in modern times, no such compromise or 3rd choice or hybrid of the two is available. If we identify with one, then the other is abandoned.

2) Those who inhabit Babylon are not written in the Book of Life, while those who inhabit the New Jerusalem are. ⁸ ***The beast you saw once was, now is not, and will come up from the Abyss; but it is on its way to destruction. The people living on earth whose names have not been written in the Book of Life since the founding of the world will be astounded to see the beast that once was, now is not, but is to appear.*** ^{CJB} Rev. 17:8

As for the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem: ²⁷ ***Nothing impure may enter it, nor anyone who does shameful things or lies; the only ones who may enter are those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.*** ^{CJB} Rev. 21:27

3) Babylon's destiny is to be a home for demons. ² ***He cried out in a strong voice, "She has fallen! She has fallen! Bavel the Great! She has become a home for demons, a prison for every unclean spirit, a prison for every unclean, hated bird.*** ^{CJB} Rev. 18:2. New Jerusalem's destiny is to be the home for God. ³ ***I heard a loud voice from the throne say, "See! God's Sh'khinah is with mankind, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and he himself, God-with-them, will be their God.*** ^{CJB} Rev. 21:3

There are several more contrasts I could list but for the sake of time we'll move on. These 3 points alone ought to wake us, Believers in Christ, to be aware that just like in John's day the Believing congregations that we in our time call Churches, are faltering and compromising with Babylon instead of holding fast to God and His Word. The 7 letters that begin the Book of Revelation are not only addressing 7 real congregations, but are meant for all Believers and all congregations of Believers as well. Some are commended for persevering, others are condemned for their lack of faithfulness. The warning is severe for those who make concessions with evil for the sake of getting along in their societies: their salvation history will be reversed. They will become outsiders. They will not be permitted to be part of the eternal Kingdom of God. The choice is stark: be determined and long-suffering to obey God and by

doing so remain faithful and receive the most amazing eternal reward we can imagine, or, compromise, disobey, and lose our inheritance altogether.

So as we open our Bibles today to its final chapter, let's not become so enthralled with the End Times prophetic imagery that we forget these important fundamentals of our faith and of the book itself that we just went over.

Open your Bible to Revelation chapter 22.

READ REVELATION CHAPTER 22 all

In verse 1 John sees a river flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb that he describes as containing the water of life. In fact, the term "water of life" can be translated as living water. Many Bible commentators say that we should look to Ezekiel 47 to read about the prophecy of this river full of living water because it is this New Jerusalem that Ezekiel is describing. I disagree. Ezekiel's descriptions of Jerusalem include elaborate details about a Temple building and a Levite Priesthood. The source of the river of living water in Ezekiel is this Temple building he describes. However as Revelation chapter 21 verse 22 informs, the new earth and the New Jerusalem will have no Temple building. Rather, the opening verse of Revelation 22 says that this river of living water will be flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb.

The point that we are meant to notice is the **source** of the living water: it comes from God. Living water is for the purpose of purification and in reality only God can purify that which is unclean. In Old Testament times, and early in New Testament times prior to the destruction of the Temple, living water was essential in daily ritual. It was what Mikvehs had to be filled with. It was what priests had to wash with before they could serve at the Temple. Living water was water that came from a moving source like an artesian well, or a river, or a fresh water sea that had an inlet and an outlet or was spring fed, or even the ocean. However this use of water as a cleansing agent was but symbolic of a work that God has to do spiritually upon and within a person or an object. The water itself had no magical power to remove defilement; rather it was sincere obedience to God's laws regarding the means He provided to make that which was unclean clean again that was the point. Therefore the water flowing from God's and the Lamb's throne represents the eternally continuing flow of purification that emits from the divine throne. But it will not be used in a ritual way to purify anyone or anything, because the new cosmos will be in an eternally pure state and defilement a thing of the past.

The imagery of a river that purifies is also present in the Psalms. Psalm 46 is very well known in Christianity because of its first words: ² **God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.** ^{CJB} **Ps. 46:2.** However when those words are taken in the context of the entire Psalm we see something much larger emerge.

^{CJB} **Psalm 46:1 - 12** ¹ *For the leader. By the descendants of Korach. On 'alamot [high-pitched musical instruments?]. A song:* ² **God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.** ³ *Therefore we are unafraid, even if the earth gives way, even if the mountains tumble into the depths of the sea,* ⁴ *even if its waters rage and foam, and mountains shake at its turbulence. (Selah)*

⁵ *There is a river whose streams gladden the city of God, the holy habitation of 'Elyon-* ⁶ *God is in the city. It will not be moved- when daybreak comes, God will help it.* ⁷ *Nations were in turmoil, kingdoms were moved; his voice thundered forth, and the earth melted away.*

⁸ *ADONAI-Tzva'ot is with us, our fortress, the God of Ya'akov. (Selah)*

⁹ *Come and see the works of ADONAI, the astounding deeds he has done on the earth.*

¹⁰ *To the ends of the earth he makes wars cease- he breaks the bow, snaps the spear, burns the shields in the fire.* ¹¹ *"Desist, and learn that I am God, supreme over the nations, supreme over the earth."*

¹² *ADONAI-Tzva'ot is with us, our fortress, the God of Ya'akov. (Selah)*

We find the ideas of what is written in this Psalm in Revelation chapters 21 and 22 especially. The earth gives way; mountains disappear into the oceans; a river flows from the city of God where He lives; the earth melts. God brings an end to wars, and God-is-with-us. So what happens in the Eternal Era was long expected in Hebrew culture.

Verse 2 says that between the main street and the river that flows through New Jerusalem is a Tree of Life that produces 12 kinds of fruit, a different kind every month. And the leaves of this same tree are used for "healing" the nations. Verse 3 ends this thought by saying, there will be no more curses.

So the Tree of Life that first made its appearance in the Genesis Creation story is back. The Tree of Life had the property of giving anyone who ate its fruit eternal life. Because Adam and Eve sinned by believing the Serpent over God, and then eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, God barred them from eating from the Tree of Life. Thus the potential for never dying gave way to the certainty that Adam and Eve would perish. And that has been the condition of mankind ever since, and it will remain so for most living Believers throughout the Millennial Kingdom period. But upon the re-created new earth, the Tree of Life will return, be made accessible, and all may eat freely from it because eternal life is theirs without further qualification.

It is interesting that the number 12 again makes its appearance in that this same tree will produce 12 different kinds of fruit, each available for 1 month, and thus repeating in a yearly cycle in perpetuity. This thought (and several others) within this chapter have been very troubling to Theologians and Bible commentators. For one thing, if eternity is essentially the absence of time, will months and years still exist? And is this one single tree going to produce enough fruit to feed all the residents of the 1500 mile cube called New Jerusalem or even the whole world? Even though we have to allow that the new earth and heavens will operate on an entirely new set of physical laws, this scenario is difficult to imagine. Therefore while not disputing its truth, this may be another of several occasions where we have to conclude that this Tree of Life and the 12 fruits has an element of symbolism. What is it symbolic of? 12 is typically thought to be representative of something that is completed and of God's government

and administration. But without doubt the most significant use of the number in the Bible has to do with Israel (the 12 tribes). And all throughout Revelation we find scattered uses of the number 12 and they invariably have some connection to Israel. Could that be the case with the Tree of Life in that it is maybe a remembrance of Israel when they were a separate people..... God's first chosen people? I can't say with any certainty; but it is suspicious to me that the number 12 is again front and center.

Another issue is this matter of "healing the nations" from the leaves of the tree. We know from other passages that the earth will indeed be divided up into nations and there will be kings over those nations. But why is "healing" needed? Death, sin, disease, crime, addiction, psychosis, and every other form of human imperfection no longer exists. Perhaps a better translation than "healing" of the Greek word *therepeia* (from which we get the English word therapy) is "service" as that is one of this word's uses. So the phrase might be better translated as "serving the nations" rather than "healing the nations". Otherwise I can make little sense of it.

The phrase "no longer will there be any curses" is another that bothers Theologians. First: the CJB translation is a poor one. The Greek word that is translated as "curses" is *katanethema* and it is singular, not plural. So the phrase is "there will no longer be any curse". Once we straighten that around then we can use our knowledge of the Torah to understand that "the curse" that God put upon mankind is that sin causes death. The Torah itself (especially the part that is the Law) is based upon the existence of this curse and that is why the death penalty for certain violations of the Law was established. This principle was made famous with the erecting of the two standing stones in Canaan almost immediately after the Joshua led Israelites crossed the Jordan River; one of the stones listed the blessings and the other the curses of the Law.

Thus to a Jew in John's day it would be important to have it made clear that the curse of the Law (death) is no longer in effect on the new earth. And this fits well with Yeshua's statement in the 5th chapter of Matthew that upon the passing away of the old earth and heavens, the Torah would be abolished. Therefore it may well be (my speculation) that there is an intended connection between the leaves of the Tree of Life serving or healing the nations and the end of the curse. That is, the leaves of the Tree of Life that give eternal life also serve to represent the end of the curse that had brought eternal death.

Verse 3 is quite interesting to deal with; here's why. Notice how many thrones are mentioned: one. And yet it says that the one throne will be occupied by both God and the Lamb. This is a head scratcher and it elicits all kinds of variations of interpretation and meaning due to the several different understandings of the substance of God as well as the Trinity Doctrine. I doubt we'll definitively solve this conundrum today, however I will throw out some food for thought. All throughout the Bible God is seen as a plurality. That is, there is only one God but He consists of several attributes, or characteristics, or manifestations, or persons. In trying to explain this there are a few theories including the dual-God theory (Yehoveh is the old God and Yeshua is the new and different young God), there is also the co-equal theory whereby The Father, The Son, and (if one accepts the Trinity Doctrine) The Holy Spirit all share separate but equal status. Then there is the theory that is implied although not usually outright stated within Evangelical Christianity that while the Father may well still retain relevance it is

only as the God of the Jews, while Jesus is the more relevant as the God of the gentiles. There are other theories as well.

Clearly, if one sets manmade doctrines on the shelf and reads the Bible in its plain sense, the Bible characterizes the Father as the supreme chief of the Godhead. He directs Yeshua and the Holy Spirit, and (I claim) also the **Sh'kinah**, the Angel of the Lord, and perhaps other manifestations of Himself. Clearly God can be in Heaven while the Holy Spirit, or Yeshua, or the **Sh'kinah** is elsewhere so there is some level of individuality among these manifestations of God. And yet Christ clearly states that He can ONLY do what the Father tells Him to do. I will quote John in a couple of passages from his Gospel so that it meshes well with his thinking in Revelation.

CJB John 5:19 *Therefore, Yeshua said this to them: "Yes, indeed! I tell you that the Son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; whatever the Father does, the Son does too.*

CJB John 8:28 *So Yeshua said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM [who I say I am], and that of myself I do nothing, but say only what the Father has taught me.*

At the same time John can also say: **CJB John 1:1** *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

Now here in Revelation 22 we have God and the Lamb.... spoken of completely separately.... sharing the same throne. I think we have a couple of things going on here. First: symbolically we see that the full substance of God that includes Yeshua the Lamb, will be ruling in the New Jerusalem. We've already learned that Christ hands rule of the earth back over to God (the Father) at the end of the Millennium. Second, the organic unity of God at the beginning (before and at Creation) seems at some point to have been somewhat reoriented such that Yeshua as the saving will of God was sent to operate and fulfill His purpose on Earth, while God the Father continued to operate in Heaven. There is no hint that Yeshua operated simultaneously on earth and in Heaven. Therefore since we have just witnessed a second "beginning" in Revelation 21 with the re-creation of earth and the heavens, it might be that God has returned to the same type of organic unity as we read about in John 1:1. Or at the least what we're reading in Revelation 21 and 22 presents us with a simplistic, though not precise, mental picture of God's substance and functions that we, as but mere humans, can grasp. And third, there is a growing number of scholars who suspect that the words "and the Lamb" were added to John's Apocalypse in the centuries following John. They, too, immediately notice that God is spoken of as one, and that there is only one throne present in New Jerusalem, and yet verse 3 says this: "The throne of God **and of the Lamb** will be in the city, and HIS servants will worship HIM". One throne to occupy and one person is to be worshipped. And yet we essentially have two persons occupying the same throne, with only one to be worshipped.... but we're not told which one. The plurals and singulars don't match up. Therefore these commentators believe that in perhaps the late 2nd or early 3rd century, somebody (no doubt a gentile Christian) added the words "and the Lamb" to emphasize Jesus who is otherwise left out.

I don't know which if any of these explanations is correct. But what we can know without equivocation is that the unified God is going to rule the earth and the Universe from His throne in New Jerusalem and that is where He has chosen to be worshipped. It is yet another indication that Heaven and Earth have melded together in some inexplicable way because the mention of Heaven as a separate place from Earth, a place of another and different dimension where God and the angels dwelled, is no longer here and it had been front and center since the beginning of Revelation, and actually since after Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Whereas God's home had always been Heaven, now His home is earth as He dwells among humans and probably the angels as well.

Verse 4 explains that God's servant-worshippers will wear His name on their foreheads. This is direct connection to the High Priest wearing God's name on his forehead and as we discussed earlier, the meaning is for the worshipper to identify with God and no other.

Verse 5 repeats some things that were said towards the end of chapter 21 and begins by reiterating that night will no longer exist (another indication that the Universe is no longer one of opposites since there will only be daytime). Any kind of darkness is viewed negatively by the Holy Scriptures. Humans are born with a natural fear of darkness. When humans can't understand something, or something is secret, the term "dark" is regularly applied. There are basically two kinds of darkness the Bible speaks of: **choshek**, that is a spiritual darkness of deception and oppression, and **layil** that simply means the absence of daytime; in other words nighttime. But even nighttime is seen negatively because nighttime is when the lawless operate best, as when thieves come to steal. Neither kind of darkness will exist on the New Jerusalem, and probably also not on the entire new earth. This verse is talking about never ending light because we're told that neither the light of a lamp (artificial light) nor of the Sun (natural light) will be needed.

At the end of verse 5 we're told that "they" (presumably God's servants) will reign as kings. This makes sense because Christ promised that His Believers would reign along with Him.

^{CJB}1 Corinthians 6:2-3 ² Don't you know that God's people are going to judge the universe? If you are going to judge the universe, are you incompetent to judge these minor matters? ³ Don't you know that we will judge angels, not to mention affairs of everyday life?

Verse 6 is essentially the conclusion of the vision of chapter 21:1 to 22:5. I think it also can be seen as essentially the conclusion of all of John's visions. What comes next are not visions but John's thoughts about what he saw, and they are Yeshua's words to John given by inspiration as opposed to vision. The identity of the voice that John hears in his head is ambiguous; it might be Yeshua or perhaps it is a messenger (an angel) of Yeshua that is speaking.

The words are familiar because they were also spoken back in 21:5: "These words are trustworthy and true". So why does God repeat Himself? Back in 21:5 the speaker is identified as "The One" who is sitting on the throne. "The One" or "The Ancient One" have been used previously in the Bible to indicate God the Father. So in 21:5, it seems that it was Yehoveh, the Father, who uttered: "These words are trustworthy and true". But now in 22:6, these same

words seem to be coming from Yeshua the Lamb. The speaker identifies Himself as "I am coming very soon". And then in verse 12, we read "Pay attention, says Yeshua, I am coming soon....." So it is difficult to come to any other conclusion than the speaker of verse 22:6 is Messiah Yeshua. Thus we have the Father and the Lamb separately saying that: "These words are trustworthy and true". I emphasize the separateness because shortly we're going to see that separateness diminish.

One of the more challenging statements in this verse is when God is called "God of the spirit of the prophets". What, exactly, does that mean? Greek linguistic experts suggest that the technical grammatical structure of this phrase is more literally and correctly translated as "the God who inspires the spirits of the prophets". So spirits is little "s" spirits, which doesn't mean the Holy Spirit but more means the activating or essential element of a person that influences that person's thoughts, motives, and behaviors. And for the prophets it meant that they allowed God to move within that element of themselves so that their thoughts, motives, and behaviors reflected His will and not their own.

One final thought for today. The speaker in verse 6 says that the purpose of these divine visions given to John is so that God's worshippers will be privy to what is going to happen soon. Some of the ancient Greek manuscripts of Revelation include the word "soon" or "quickly" and others do not. Thus in one reading the sense is simply that these visions are prophetic of things that must happen (in some indefinite time period). And in another reading they are things that must happen "soon". I don't know for sure which was originally intended. I do know, however, that the 1st and 2nd generation of Believers (particularly the Jewish Believers) thought that Christ's return and thus the happenings of the End Times were imminent. After those generations, when time passed and nothing happened, and as gentiles gained more control over the Believing congregations, the sense of urgency lessened considerably.

However, as concerns us today, we can legitimately think of what is going to happen as "soon" in the relative sense. It is self-evident that the End Times is 2000 years closer to happening than when John wrote this book. And since we know that in order for most of these things to come about Israel must have returned as a nation to their original land, which it did a mere 70 years ago, then no doubt the beginning of End Times events is going to come sooner than later. That knowledge ought to fill us with a renewed sense of resolution and devotion to prepare not only our own hearts and to bring our thoughts and behaviors in line with God's commandments, but also to do our level best to influence others to seek God and His Son, Yeshua the Christ, for eternal protection.

We'll continue with chapter 22 next week.