

Study 24: Revelation Chapter 22

Introduction

“...The concluding message is simple – I am coming soon! Three times we read the words (22:7,12,20). The prophecy of the Revelation is complete – and it is to remain unsealed in view of the impending Return (v.10). Don’t disobey it (v.7). Don’t hide it (v.10). Don’t meddle with it (v.18-20). The reason, in each case is ‘I am coming soon.’ ...”

Body of the Study

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The River of Life

The Final Message

Do Not Seal Up the Book

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Homework and preparation for next week:

Re-read chapter 22

Read the notes as a review of the study

Skim read the notes in preparation for the next study

If you have the time, re-read the whole book

What does the water of life represent?

What plagues will come on those who tamper with the book (22:18)? Be specific as to what you think the plagues are.

Some religious people believe that the destruction of the world will be the result of a nuclear holocaust. How does that view fit in with the plagues? Could a nuclear war come upon someone who interfered with the prophecy in the 2nd or 10th centuries?

Notes for study 24: Revelation Chapter 22

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Introduction

Revelation 22 takes us a full circle from the Garden of Eden. In the garden we see the tree of life, and man separated from God by sin. In Revelation 22, sin has been overcome, and man has been put back into the perfect relationship with God again – with the tree of life feeding the nations continually. Hailey notes²:

In Eden there was a garden, a river, the tree of life, man’s disobedience and separation from these, a curse pronounced on the serpent, the soil and indirectly, upon man, for it brought death and separation from God. In the city of God, the eternal Eden of the redeemed, there is the river of water of life, the tree of life, the absence of a curse, and a perfect and full fellowship of the redeemed with God. What was lost in Eden is now fully restored; God’s purpose is achieved.

The River of Life

The vision and the description of the New Jerusalem continues from the previous chapter. *“...Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb...”* (22:1 NIV). Jesus had promised living water to the woman at the well (Jn 4:10), and here we see the source of that living water. A contrast is implied here between the pure and clear living water, and the streams of earth which are polluted and become “wormwood” (8:10). However, the emphasis is not on the physical pollution of the waterways, but on the moral and spiritual corruption. The waterway flowed through the middle of the city, indicating that it was readily and freely available to all of the inhabitants. *“...down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations...”* (22:2 NIV). The tree of life stood on each side of the river. John uses the *definite article* – not “a” tree of life on each side, but “*the*” tree of life on each side, and the tree is used collectively for all of the trees, as the street is used collectively to describe all of the streets in the city. The tree bears crops every month, so it continually supplies and nourishes the inhabitants of the city, and the leaves provide “medicine” for healing. (Of course, there will be no need of medicine when we are in the perfect relationship with God. But the point is that God provides for all our needs.)

In Eden, the curse was first pronounced on the serpent (Gen 3:14), and then on man (Gen 3:16-19). Now, man’s curse has been taken away by Jesus (Gal 3:13). In the New Jerusalem, all curses have ceased *“...No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him...”* (22:3 NIV). For the second time, the throne is described as *the throne of God and of the Lamb*. Both Jesus *and* the Father rule over God’s kingdom. The curse cannot co-exist with God, and in the City of God, all will be brought to perfection.

God’s servants will serve Him continually (as we saw in the vision of the Throne Room (chapters 4 & 5)). Whilst on earth, we know God through Jesus (Jn 14:7-11), but in heaven we will see Him face to face. Even Moses was not allowed to see God’s face, but only seeing His back caused his

¹ Bewes, p. 152

² Hailey, p. 420

face to shine (Ex 33:19-21; 29-35). "...*They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads...*" (22:4 NIV). Those who served the beast had the number of the beast inscribed on the foreheads. Those who serve the Lord have His name likewise inscribed – not literally – but rather, His name is written on our hearts!

Jesus claimed to be the light of the world (Jn 1:9; 8:12; 1 Jn 1:5). In heaven there is perfect light (perfect understanding, and perfect knowledge, as well as the perfect absence of "darkness" (sin)). "...*There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever...*" (22:5 NIV). His reign will not cease, and will not be limited.

The Final Message

The vision of the City of God concludes, and the final section of the letter begins with the transition from the angel. "...*The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."*..." (22:6 NIV). The Revelation has come a complete circle – Jesus is the one who is Faithful and True (3:14), and now the words are *faithful and true* (NKJV). When John introduces Jesus, he described Him as ... the **WORD!** The book begins by revealing *things which must shortly take place* (1:1), and ends with the assurance that they have been revealed (22:6).

With the assurance that the time will not be long (also from 1:3), the sixth Beatitude (blessing) is pronounced "...*Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.*..." (22:7 NIV). This time, the blessing is pronounced on those who keep (obey) the words of the prophecy.

John saw and heard the visions, and writes with the assurance of an eyewitness "...*I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things...*" (22:8 NIV). As with the beginning of the book (1:9) he writes to assure us of the accuracy of the account (1:11,19). As happened on a previous occasion (19:10), John fell down to worship the angel (the messenger). "...*And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me...*" (22:8 NIV). The reaction on this occasion was exactly the same as it previously had been "...*But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"*..." (22:9 NIV).

The "I, John" is reminiscent of 1:4, 9. His confession that he "heard and saw these things" and the repetition of the prohibition (19:10) against John's worshiping the angel serve a purpose. No believer, not even one of great spiritual stature as John, is beyond the subtle temptation to worship what is good itself in place of God, who alone is to be worshiped. (NIVBC).

Do Not Seal Up the Book

The book has followed through the tribulations and persecutions that would be faced by the early church under the Roman Empire. The Christians were facing difficulties that would escalate over the next 220 years, and the message was needed to be delivered to the churches immediately. "...*Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near..."*" (22:10 NIV). By contrast, Daniel had been told to seal up his visions. The "sealing" relates more to the revealing of the things of the visions, than to locking-the-scroll-away-in-a-box so that it can't be found and read by anyone. The fulfilment of Daniel's visions were still some time off (the end of the Jewish era), whereas John's visions related to the events that were to happen quickly. Hailey notes³:

³ Hailey, p. 427

John's prophecy was not to be sealed up, "for the time is at hand"; the events of its revelation were not in the distant future but were for the immediate period. The book was to be sent to the churches at that time, (1:1), and its content made applicable to all churches (22:16). Its message was to be made known, its warnings were to be heeded, and its hearers encouraged by the divine assurance of victory.

The next statement at first appears perplexing, as if the angel (or John) is approving of wrongdoing and evil behaviour. "...*Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.*"... " (22:11 NIV). Society is put into two groups – the unjust and filthy – and the righteous and holy. The choice of which group we are in is ours, and ours alone. We have to make the decision to change, but first we have to *want* to change! People who have no desire to please God are happy living in sin and depravity. We have seen their end in the lake of fire (21:8), but the choice is theirs – we cannot make them change and repent.

Assurance to the Brethren

The Lord, (through John) gives an assurance that the brethren suffering under persecution have not been forgotten. "...*Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done...*" (22:12 NIV). There are two keys within the verse – firstly, the Lord's Second Coming did not occur "soon", but the letter was written concerning *things that would shortly come to pass*. Therefore the assurance of Jesus' "coming soon" must be about the things which were soon to occur, and concerned the brethren to whom John wrote. Secondly, Jesus says, "*My reward is with me*". The reward (*misthos*) concerns pay or wages, and is the reward or the retribution for the things that we have done. On two levels, this means both our reward (or punishment) at the final judgement, and the judgement that He will bring against those who persecute His people when The Beast is overthrown. The assurance is given because of Jesus' position with God on the Throne. "...*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End...*" (22:13 NIV).

The final (seventh) beatitude links our behaviour on earth to our reward in heaven. "...*Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city...*" (22:14 NIV). Washing our robes relates to being clean and prepared for God. We are made clean by the blood of the Lamb, and Jesus called on the Laodiceans to have "...*white garments, that you may be clothed...*" (3:18 NKJV). The great multitude were "...*the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb...*" (7:14). By preparing ourselves in this life, and living our lives for Jesus, we are given *the right to the tree of life, and may enter the city*.

But outside the city are found those who are not worthy. "...*Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood...*" (22:15 NIV). None of us are worthy by virtue of our own deeds and actions – we are only made worthy by the blood of Jesus, who became the sacrifice ("propitiation" or "appeasement") on our behalf. But living for Jesus requires us to *do something*. We cannot claim to belong to Him and continue to live a life of sin. John describes the sorts of behaviours that characterise such a life of sin – murder – sexual immorality – idolatry – occult practices. Paul says that we are to "...*Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them...*" (Eph 5:11).

The whole book of Revelation is authenticated by Jesus "...*I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.*"... " (22:16 NIV). It was addressed specifically to the seven churches of Asia Minor, but has much wider application to churches everywhere.

...any method of interpreting Revelation that blunts the application of this message in its entirety to the present church disregards these words of Christ. He is the Messiah of

Israel, "the Root and the Offspring of David" (cf. Isa 11:1; Rev 5:5), and the fulfillment of the "Star" promise to the overcomers at Thyatira (2:28). (NIVBC).

Concluding Comments

The letter concludes with an invitation, a warning, and an assurance. The invitation is an expression of the church for the Lord to quickly end the persecution and avenge the saints. "...*The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life...*" (22:17 NIV). Hailey notes⁴:

God's instruments for declaring the Word, are to urge all to come. Those who yearn for a higher life, a spiritual life fed from the fountain of eternal life, are now urged to come and drink freely of the water of life. ... The final call is now being made, the water is being offered free for the taking; the invitation is warm and cordial, but each must come willingly. He who comes and drinks of this water shall not thirst again (John 6:35).

The NIV Bible Commentary adds:

The first two sentences are not an evangelistic appeal but express the yearning of the Holy Spirit and the "bride" (the whole church, cf. 21:9) for the return of Christ. In v. 20 John gives us the Lord Jesus' answer: "Yes, I am coming soon." The members of the local congregations in John's time join in the invitation for Christ to return. Then, any in the congregations who are not yet followers of Jesus are invited to come and take the water of life as a free gift (cf. Ro 3:24; Rev 21:6). On "the water of life," cf. 21:6; 22:1; see also v. 20). (NIVBC).

The warning is given – not to tamper with the message. "...*I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. ¹⁹ And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book...*" (22:18-19 NIV). Whilst this specifically applies to what John wrote, the same principle applies to all scripture. Paul told Timothy "...*all scripture is given by inspiration of God...*" (2 Tim 3:16 - It is God-breathed). We do not have the authority to change the things that God has said. We might not like it, but it is our duty to obey it! As an example, in the modern world there is a strong desire to have women in leadership positions. This is fine in the business world, but God has declared how it must be in the church: "...*And I do not permit a women to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression...*" (1 Tim 2:12-14 NKJV). We might not like what it says, and we might think that it would be better if the women did teach. However, that is not up to us! What is up to us, is our obedience – to do what God says – and to do it His way! We could draw many more examples!

The Lord's return is the assurance: "...*He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus...*" (22:20 NIV). This is the third time the assurance has been given in the chapter (22:7, 12, 20). John adds his affirmation to the assurance – *Come Lord Jesus!* John pronounces a benediction to all of God's people "...*The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen...*" (22:21 NIV). This is a great word of comfort to the Christians facing persecution, as it is to us as we face the trials and tribulations of life.

A conclusion such as this is wholly appropriate for this prophetic message addressed to the ancient church and, indeed, to the whole body of Christ. The benediction is reminiscent of Paul's usual practice (cf. the final verses in his letters). Nothing less than God's grace is required for us to be overcomers and triumphantly enter the Holy City of God, where we shall reign with him forever and ever. (NIVBC).

⁴ Hailey, p. 432