

REVELATION EXPLANATIONS — Chapter 22

compiled by Kevin Jensen for Bible 101 — Summit View Church of Christ — April 2019

YOU ARE HERE

22:1-5 — THE HOLY CITY (continued)

THE MAIN POINT

This first section of chapter 22 finishes the tour of the Holy City offered to John by an angel in 21:9. This city, also called “the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (21:9), is a symbolic representation of the church itself, eternally glorified as God’s faithful people in God’s own presence. In these verses, John emphasizes the glory of being a part of this city: there will be true life, eternal and rich, with healing and light for everyone.

SHORT KEY TO SYMBOLS IN THIS SECTION

The Water of Life = a symbol for eternal life

The City = the church glorified in God’s presence (see chap. 21)

The Tree of Life = another symbol for eternal life

The Curse = God’s curse of the earth & the human race (Gen. 3)

BACKGROUND TEXTS —

Ezekiel 47:1-12

Zechariah 14:8

John 4:10-13

Jeremiah 17:13

John 7:37-39

Genesis 2-3

Romans 8:18-25

22:1-3 — eternal life

As the angel of 21:9 shows John the holy city, John sees 2 great symbols of eternal life for God’s people:

THE WATER OF LIFE —

First, John sees “the river of the water of life” flowing pure and clear from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the city’s great street. “The water of life” or “living water” carries 2 meanings in

the Bible:

- (1) This water often symbolizes the richness of life blessed by God’s presence, sometimes implying eternal life. This is the primary meaning here in Revelation 22. The miraculous river Ezekiel saw in his vision of a renewed Jerusalem (Ezekiel 47:1-12) carried this meaning: it grew deeper and wider as it flowed out from the temple until it reached the Dead Sea, which it miraculously healed so that all kinds of fish could live in it. In a similar image, the prophet Zechariah (14:8) foresaw that when the Lord comes, “living water” will flow out of Jerusalem to both the west and the east year-round. Jesus used similar terminology when he offered a Samaritan woman “living water” that wells up to eternal life (John 4:10-14). Revelation refers to “the water of life,” probably using this same meaning, in 7:17, 21:6, 22:1-3, and 22:17.
- (2) Less often, this water symbolizes God himself, the creator and giver of life with the power to grant eternal life. In Jeremiah 17:13, Jeremiah writes that those who turn away from the Lord will be put to shame “because they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water.” Jesus used a similar meaning of “living water” in John 7:37-39, in which he promised that for anyone who believes in him, “streams of living water will flow from within him”; John explains that this “living water” is the Holy Spirit. Here in Revelation, God as “the water of life” is not the main meaning, but the water is still connected to him in that it comes from his throne and by his power brings life to his people.

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THE TREE OF LIFE (and NO MORE CURSE) – Second, John sees “the tree of life” growing on each side of the great river, perhaps arching over it. It bears a crop of fruit every month and its leaves are used for healing the nations. The tree of life originally stood in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8-9), and Adam and Eve, the first humans, had God’s permission to eat from it (Genesis 2:16-17). Its fruit had the power to allow them to live forever (Genesis 3:22). However, when Adam and Eve began to sin against the Lord, the Lord banished them from the garden so that they could no longer eat from the tree of life and live forever (Genesis 3:22); in this way, the Lord’s warning that Adam and Eve would die if they disobeyed him came to pass (Genesis 2:17). Here in Revelation, John foresees that the church, saved and exalted in God’s presence, will once again have access to this long-lost source of eternal life, which will bear its fruit year-round and provide leaves for healing all peoples. It will be like being in the Garden of Eden all over again. (Jesus also promised the faithful the right to eat from the tree of life in Revelation 2:7 and will again in 22:14.)

Along with its description of the tree of life, Revelation 22:3 says, “No longer will there be any curse.” This curse is the curse of Genesis 3:14-19, a curse of suffering, difficulty, and ultimately death. This curse – including death – will be removed when God glorifies his people. In Romans 8:18-25, Paul wrote about this curse, explaining that God’s creation waits eagerly for the glorification of God’s people, when “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” Paul says that the creation “has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth,” waiting for its freedom from frustration and decay.

This passage here in Revelation describes the water of life and the tree of life to encourage Christians in the time of Revelation (as well as us today) to remain faithful to God in anticipation of a great reward: eternal life. It will not be like our lives now, but as God intended and created life to be at the beginning: free from death, decay, and frustration.

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| <p> <u>Keys to</u> <u>Interpretation</u></p> | <p> 22:3-5 – God with his servants These verses offer 3 indications of the closeness that the saved will have with God in eternal life: • “they will see his face” (verses 3-4) – They will see God, for he will be immediately present among them. Moreover, they will be pleasing to him (in contrast to Absalom who, after murdering his brother, was unacceptable to their father David and was not permitted to see his face; 2 Samuel 14:24, 28). God’s throne will be in the city (that is, among his people, the church), his servants will serve him, and his name will be on their foreheads (indicating that they belong to him, as in 7:3, 9:4, and 14:1). • “the Lord God will give them light” (verse 5) – As in 21:23-24, God’s presence will be a source of glorious light for his people, so much so that no other light source will be necessary. • “they will reign for ever and ever” – God’s people will reign for eternity – not on their own, but with God and also with Jesus, as Jesus indicated in 2:26 and 3:21. Other biblical hints of the authority God’s people will have in eternity include Daniel 7:27 and 1 Corinthians 6:3.</p> |
| <p> - God with his servants -</p> | |

22:6-17 — THE INVITATION

THE MAIN POINT

In this middle part of chapter 22, John's vision draws to a close. This text restates the 2 destinies that a person may choose from by his or her way of life, and an invitation is offered for those who desire eternal life to come and get it.

SHORT KEY TO SYMBOLS IN THIS SECTION

Alpha and Omega = the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet (Revelation was originally written in the Greek language), and so symbols of the beginning and the end

The Tree of Life = a symbol for eternal life

The City = the church glorified in God's presence (as in chapter 21)

The Water of Life = another symbol for eternal life

The Morning Star = may signify a rising hope (as Venus, the literal morning "star," announces the coming of the new day's sun)

BACKGROUND TEXTS — Revelation 1:1 and 3:11

22:6, 7, 10, 12, 20 — soon

Revelation insists that the things predicted in this book — particularly the return of Jesus — are coming "soon." 1:1 begins the book by saying that God is showing "his servants what must soon take place," and in 22:6 and 22:10 the angel speaking with John reaffirms that statement. These predictions indicate that the church needs to be ready for God to do as he predicted against their persecutors in the Roman Empire, and that it was scheduled to happen "soon." Even so, these prophecies, like all prophecies, were subject to God's right to change his plans if the people involved changed their behavior (see Jeremiah 18:1-10).

In 3:11, 22:7, 22:12, and 22:20, Jesus himself declares that he is coming soon. How soon he considers to be "soon" is subject to interpretation and debate until he does come again (but remember Peter's teaching that God is waiting for as many people to be saved as possible — 2 Peter 3:8-9). Nevertheless, Jesus' declaration gives Revelation a sense of urgency: he will come, and his return will certainly be sudden — as passages like 2 Peter 3:10-12, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4, and Matthew 24:36-44 remind us. So regardless of exactly when Jesus will return, his point here is that his people need to take the message of Revelation to heart and be ready for his coming. For anyone who is not ready, his return will be too soon.

BACKGROUND TEXTS — Revelation 19:10, Acts 10:25-26

22:8-9 — Worship God!

For the second time in Revelation (the first time was in 19:10), John is so overcome by this vision that he falls down to worship the angel delivering it to him. As in 19:10, the angel commands him not to do this, but to worship God, for the angel was merely a fellow servant with John, other prophets, and those who obey God's word in Revelation. In Acts 10:25-26, a similar event occurred when Cornelius, ready to hear the gospel message from Peter, fell at Peter's feet in reverence, only to have Peter instruct

him to stand up ("I am only a man myself," Peter said). Angels and people are not to be worshiped (notice Colossians 2:18); only God, whom angels and humans are all called to serve, is to be worshiped.

BACKGROUND TEXT — Daniel 12:4

22:10-11 — keep it open

"The time is near," the angel tells John. Therefore, unlike the angel in Daniel 12:4, who told Daniel to "close up and seal" the words he had been given in his vision because they concerned the distant future, this angel tells John not to seal up the words of this prophecy — God's people needed to hear them right away. Then the angel calls for those who do wrong and are vile to continue their ways, while those who do right and are

holy continue theirs. This is the angel's way of indicating that things will continue as they are for a while — but then, before too long, the Lord's words in Revelation will come to pass.

