

Seven Last Things

Sometimes it can be comforting to know how a story ends. I like to read suspense novels, where someone gets kidnapped, or the characters are being chased by a murderer. When I'm reading one of these books and I get to an especially tense situation, I will flip ahead a few chapters to make sure that things turn out the way I want them to. It helps me get through those tough chapters if I know that things will get better.

The same is true for life, isn't it? When we're in the middle of a tough situation, it makes it easier to endure if we know that things are going to get better. As long as we have hope, then we can face anything that life throws at us.

Fortunately, we know the end of our story. There's a southern gospel song by the Cathedrals that goes:

I've been reading in the Bible bout the ending of the age
And one thing that's for certain, it grows closer every day.
But I am not concerned about the way it's gonna end
Cause I've read the back of the book and we win.¹

We don't know specific details about how our lives here on earth will turn out, but we do know what's waiting for us when life on earth ends. We can turn to the back of the Book (the Bible), read the last few chapters, and have hope that we will win. This is not an earthly hope. Earthly hope is uncertain. We can hope that the Chiefs win the Super Bowl again, but we have absolutely no way of knowing that outcome. We can hope that our family doesn't get sick, but there's a possibility that they will. Our hope, however, is a sure thing. We know that we will win because God has already ordained that we will. He has promised us victory, and we can be 100% certain that it will happen.

That's what tonight's lessons is all about.. We're finally at the end of the book, and we're going to see this glorious future that is promised to us, one that should give us hope to endure whatever trials we face on earth. From chapters 19 and 20 we'll see the hope that can be found in the return of Christ. In chapters 21-22, we'll see the hope that can be found in the restoration of all things.

Finding Hope in the Return of Christ (Chapters 19-20)

Hope in God's Justice (19:1-5)

We ended last time with the destruction of Babylon. What does Babylon symbolize?

¹<https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/The-Cathedrals-feat-Roger-Bennett/I-ve-Read-the-Back-of-the-Book>

Babylon symbolizes the wicked worldly system that lures people away from God and into idolatry. She is called prostitute because she seduces people into spiritual adultery.

In Revelation 19:1-5, John sees a great multitude rejoicing over Babylon's destruction. They realize that God's judgments are true and just. Babylon's destruction was a fitting punishment for her crimes. She sought to destroy the saints of God, so God destroyed her. In doing so, He avenged the blood of His people (v.2).

Remember, this the end of the story. We are still living in the middle of the story. Babylon has not yet been defeated. We are surrounded by her influence, and we are even tempted by her seduction.

In what ways are we influenced and tempted by Babylon?

Just looking at our present reality, Babylon seems irresistible at times, and even invincible. The power of evil in this world can sometimes seem overwhelming. We constantly hear stories of how Christians are being persecuted around the world, and even to a degree in our own country. Those who resist Babylon are often destroyed by her while the wicked seem to prosper. We may wonder with the saints in Revelation 6:10, how long do we have to wait for justice? When will God avenge His people?

God's people have been waiting for justice for a long time. The Psalmist Asaph wrote about this very thing in Psalm 73, which was probably written around 710 B.C. At first, all Asaph sees is what seems like injustice:

I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind...Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. (v.3-4, 12-13).

Asaph sees the wicked prosper while the rest of mankind is stricken with trouble. He even wonders if he's been obeying God in vain. He doesn't find satisfaction until he considers what will be the end of the wicked (v.17). He writes, "Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!" (v.18-19).

Like Asaph, if we just focus on what we see around us, we might despair. It might seem like evil is winning. We might wonder if it's even worth following God when His people seem to have more trouble and heartache than the unbelievers next door.

But like Asaph, we must focus on the end of the story. We know what will happen to the wicked. According to Asaph, they will be destroyed in a moment and swept away by terrors. That sounds like it could be describing the judgments we've read in Revelation. Even if the wicked never have to answer for their sins here on earth, we can find hope in the fact that one day they will stand before God and answer to Him. God's justice will be complete. Every evil deed that was done

will be punished. Every martyr's blood will be avenged. We can rejoice even now with the multitude in heaven, worshipping and praising God, proclaiming, "Amen. Hallelujah!"

Hope in Our Marriage (19:6-10)

Next, John hears a voice praising God and announcing the marriage of the Lamb to His Bride. Marriage between a man and a woman is intended to be a picture of our relationship with Christ, as we see from Ephesians 5:22-33. In that passage, Paul compares a husband's love for his wife to Christ's love for the church. He also compares the wife's submission to her husband to the church's submission to Christ. He writes the following:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (v.25-27).

We see in these verses that Christ is preparing His Bride for the wedding. Why do we need Christ to prepare us for the wedding?

On our own, all we have to wear to the wedding are dirty, filthy rags, as we see in Isaiah 64:6. Jesus takes it upon Himself to make sure that we are adequately clothed. He washes us clean and dresses us in His own righteousness. We see in Revelation 19:8 that it is granted the Bride to wear fine linen, bright and pure.

However, although we are provided with the clothing, we must do our part in putting it on. We see at the end of verse seven that the Bride has made herself ready for the wedding. Then, at the end of verse eight, it says that the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

First, to prepare for the wedding, we must accept Christ's work for us on the cross and be saved. This wedding is by invitation only, according to verse 9. Only those in Christ can attend. So, we must be sure that we are in Christ, washed clean by His blood and dressed in His righteousness alone.

This wedding is not going to take place for some time. As we wait, we must be sure that we're keeping our dress clean by living a pure, holy life full of righteous deeds. Those deeds alone won't gain us access to the wedding. However, we choose to keep ourselves pure out of love for our Groom.

As I said, marriage is a picture of our relationship with Christ. From an early age, little girls dream of falling in love and getting married. God wired us that way. We want someone to love us unconditionally. We want someone who make us feel cherished and special, and we look for that in romantic relationships. That's the way God intended it to be, but because of the Fall, even the best marriage is tainted by sin. There is no man on earth that can be for us what we long for him to be. If we are looking for unconditional love and being cherished only from a spouse, we will always be disappointed. Some people are not married, so they don't have a spouse to

provide them with those things. Even those of us that are married will find that our husbands inevitably let us down sometimes.

Our hope, though, is in the fact that one day, we will be united with Christ in marriage. He will be able to meet our deepest longings. He will never disappoint us. He will love us unconditionally. While earthly marriages will always end, through divorce or the death of a spouse, our marriage to Christ will last forever and ever and ever.

Hope in Christ's Victory (19:11-21)

Next, John sees heaven opened and a rider on a white horse appear, along with the armies of heaven (v.14). This rider is Christ, but He's dressed for war, not a wedding. There are a few things He must take care of before the marriage can take place. He's prepared the Bride for the wedding; now He must prepare for her the perfect home.

We talked last time about how God's wrath serves a double purpose. Can someone remind us the purposes of God's wrath?

It is His way of executing justice against evildoers, but it's also His way of cleansing the world of evil in order to make the new heaven and new earth a pure, holy dwelling place.

So, John sees this vision of Jesus sitting on a white horse. Jesus is described as having eyes like flames (v.12), which shows that He can see and judge the human heart. He's wearing many crowns (v.12), indicating His authority to judge. His robe is dipped with blood, likely the blood of His enemies (v.13), which is an allusion to Isaiah 63:3:

I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood splattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel.

John makes the connection in verse 15, where he writes that Christ "will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty." Jesus also has a sharp sword coming from His mouth (v.15), which represents the powerful nature of His Word.

Throughout this passage we see various names of Christ. In verse 12, we see that He has a name written that no none knows but himself. This shows that some parts of His coming are still a mystery. However, He's also called Faithful and True (v.11), The Word of God (v.13), King of kings, and Lord of lords (v.15).

We are told the purpose of Jesus' second coming. John writes that He is coming in righteousness to judge and make war (v.11). He will strike down the nations, and rule them with a rod of iron (v.15), which is a fulfillment of Psalm 2:9. He will also trample the unrighteous with the fury of God's wrath, as grapes trampled in a winepress (v.15).

For the Bride of Christ, His coming will be a glorious celebration, something to look forward to. But for those outside of Christ, it will be a horrific time of judgment and punishment. In fact, John goes on to describe just how terrible it will be in Revelation 19:17-18:

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great."

Earlier in the chapter, we read about the marriage supper of the Lamb. What a contrast to this supper, where the flesh of God's enemies will be devoured by birds! To us, this may seem like a random thing, but it would have been significant to the John's Jewish audience. In Deuteronomy 28, God gives the people a list of blessings that will be theirs if they obey all of His commandments. He then gives them a list of curses that will befall them if they disobey. One of those curses is that their dead bodies "shall be food for all birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten them away" (v.26). So, for a person's body to be devoured in such a way would be seen as the ultimate punishment by God.

Then, John's attention turns to the beast and the false prophet with their armies gathered to make war against Christ and His army.

Can anyone remind us what the Beast and the false prophet (or second beast) represent from an earlier lesson?

The beast represents the government, which Satan uses to oppress and persecute God's people. The false prophet, referred to in chapter 13 as the second beast, represents false religion or religious leaders that deceive the people into worshiping Satan.

So, we have these two armies gathered for war, there's not going to be an actual battle, with the two armies rushing at each other with swords and shields, engaging in hand-to-hand combat, like you might see on Lord of the Rings. That's not necessary. We see that the beast and the false prophet will be captured and thrown alive into the lake of fire (v.20). The rest of the evil army will be slain by the sword that comes from the mouth of Christ (v.21). Jesus will do our fighting for us, and He will be victorious.

Again, this is the end of the story. Right now, the beast and the false prophet still have great power. The government is increasingly oppressing Christians in our country. False religion is alive and well, even in so-called Christian churches. The false prophet is deceiving numerous people with his lies. Things are looking pretty dismal for our nation.

However, our hope is found in Christ's victory. The days of the beast and the false prophet are numbered. They will be defeated in the end. No matter how bad things get for us now, we can look forward to the day when there is no more oppression and persecution, when there are no lies being told. Instead, we will be able to freely worship our God in the truth of His word.

Hope in Christ's Reign (20:1-6)

We come now to another controversial passage, this one pertaining to the thousand-year reign of Christ. John sees an angel holding a key to the bottomless pit and a chain. He comes down,

binds Satan, and throws him into a pit, where he is sealed until the thousand years are ended. While in the pit, Satan can no longer deceive the nations.

Then, John sees thrones for those given authority to judge. He sees the souls of those killed for their faith. They came to life and reigned with Christ for the thousand years, which is the first resurrection. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years had ended.

There is so much debate about what all this means. There are three main views, each with a different understanding of when these events will take place.

1. Premillennialists-They view the events of this passage as occurring after the second coming described in 19:11-21. So, according to this view, Jesus' return happens before the thousand-year reign, which will be a period of earthly peace and prosperity. Believers will receive resurrection bodies at the beginning of the Millennium, but evildoers will not be judged until afterwards, when Satan is loosed for one final rebellion.²

2. Amillennialists-According to this view, the Millennium is a picture of the period that we're in now, from the resurrection to the return of Christ, also called elsewhere the Last Days. Christ is currently reigning with the saints in heaven. Satan was bound by the death and resurrection of Christ, so his power is limited. He can no longer deceive the nations, in that now people from all nations, tribes, and tongues will be able to accept the gospel where previously it was only for the Israelites. This view sees this passage as a restatement of 19:11-21 rather than events that follow chronologically. It also sees the thousand years as symbolic rather than a literal time period.³

3. Postmillennialists-Those who hold this view believe that the church will experience a drastic expansion, meaning that the gospel will spread in great revival of sorts. Some see the thousand years as a literal period of Christian triumph where things will just be amazing here on earth. Other postmillennialists agree with the amils that the thousand years refers to the period beginning with Christ's resurrection.⁴

Now, these are just general descriptions. I'm sure each view is much more involved. I personally hold the amillennial view. For one thing, it makes the most sense to me. But it's also the view that gives us hope right now.

It's comforting to think that Satan is currently bound and that his power is limited. That gives me hope that, with Christ's help, I can actually resist his attacks. It's also comforting to think of Christ reigning over the world as we speak. Things seem crazy and out of control in our world, but really, everything is happening according to God's plan. It's also very comforting to think that the souls of our dead loved ones are reigning with Christ right now. Over the last few years, it seems like so many people I know have passed away. Just this week, my mom's close friend died, and her funeral was today. Imagining those people in the presence of God makes their loss

²Poythress, Vern. *The Returning King*, 177-178.

³³Ibid., 178.

⁴Ibid.

a little easier. It also takes away some of my fear of death, knowing that as soon as I die, I will be with Christ.

At the end of this passage, in verse 6, we have another blessed statement:

Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

The first resurrection mentioned could refer to the life of the disembodied Christian in heaven. When a Christian dies, their soul is immediately resurrected to be with Christ. It could also refer to the new birth or the new life that's experienced when a person becomes a Christian. We were dead in our sins, but we are resurrected to new life in Christ. If you have experienced this first resurrection of being born again, then you will not face the second death, which is where unbelievers are sent to hell for all eternity. Again, this is a source of great hope, knowing that instead of the eternal torment that we deserve as punishment for our sins, we will receive eternal blessing in the presence of Christ.

Hope in Satan's Defeat (20:7-10)

In the previous section, we saw that Satan was bound and thrown into a pit. However, in this passage we see that at the end of the Millennium, he will be released for one last rebellion. He will once again be able to deceive the nations, and he will gather an army from the four corners of the earth. Gog and Magog are mentioned here, which is an allusion to Ezekiel chapters 38-39. Gog and Magog represent the final enemies of God.⁵

We must keep in mind the symbolic nature of Revelation. This is not a literal battle. Right before Christ's second coming, Satan will be allowed one last hurrah. From our human perspective, it will seem like evil is spreading drastically as Satan gathers his army and that Christians are suffering more than ever. This is the same battle as the battle at Armageddon we discussed last time in Revelation 16. This is the same time period in which the two witnesses will be killed in Revelation 11. This is also the time period in which people expect the rise of an Antichrist.

Satan's army is huge, numbering as many as the grains of sand in the sea. It's large enough to surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city (v.9). However, they are no match for God. Fire comes down from heaven and consumes the evil army, and Satan is thrown into the lake of fire with the beast and false prophet, where they will all be tormented day and night forever and ever (v.10).

As long as we live on earth, there will be sin and suffering and pain, much of that caused by Satan and his followers. Yet, we can find hope in knowing that Satan will ultimately be defeated. He can try his best to overcome the forces of God, yet he doesn't stand a chance against God's power and might. So, no matter how wicked the world around us becomes, no matter how many

⁵Ibid., 182.

battles Satan wins in this world, we know the end of the story. We know that God will win the war.

Hope in God's Judgment (20:11-15)

After the defeat of Satan, there's only one more thing that must happen before our marriage to the Lamb...judgment before the great white throne of God. Now, there's a tremendous amount of confusion, I think, about what judgment will look like. Growing up, I was taught that one day we would stand before everyone and all of our deeds would be exposed like a movie playing for everyone to see. Every single sin we've ever committed would be on public display.

What have you heard, or what do you believe about the judgment?

I'm still trying to process it, but I'll explain it to the best of my understanding.

Based on the entire teaching of Scripture, it seems that for believers there will be two judgments. The first is before the great white throne of God, as we see here in this passage. John sees all of the dead standing before the throne of God, including believers. This takes place after the resurrection, according verse 13, and we see that even unbelievers will be resurrected. God has some books before Him in which are written every deed ever done by every person that has ever lived. He also has another book, the book of life. The dead are judged by what's in these books (v.12). The book of life contains all the names of those whose sins are covered by the blood of the Lamb. If your name is in the book of life, you are granted entrance to heaven because your sins have been forgiven and no longer condemn you. If your name is not in the book of life, then you are judged according to the deeds recorded in the other books, and you are condemned to hell.

The second judgment for believers is not found in Revelation, but we read about it in three different passages: Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:10-4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10. Based on these passages we learn that the judgment seat of Christ, the bema seat, is intended to be a time of reward, not punishment. We know that there is no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ (Rom.8:1). Our sins have been forgiven and cast into the depths of the sea (Psalm 103:12). In 1 Corinthians 4:5, Paul writes that the purpose of this judgment is to "bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God." Notice he says *praise* will come from God, not rebuke. According to John MacArthur, "God gives rewards to the victors; He does not whip the losers."⁶ We may suffer disappointment if we have wasted our lives and not done anything of eternal value. It would be a shame to stand before Christ and receive no reward. But we don't have to fear punishment for sins.

Thinking about judgment may cause fear in those who are not Christians. For those of us in Christ, however, it can be a source of hope because we can be confident that our names are written in the book of life. We can know beyond a doubt that our entrance into heaven was secured by the blood of the Lamb. We can look forward to a day when all evil is removed from

⁶<https://www.gty.org/library/questions/QA97/what-is-the-purpose-of-the-judgement-seat-of-christ>

the earth, preparing the way for the new heaven and the new earth, where all things are restored to the way God intended them to be.

Hope in the Restoration of All Things (Chapters 21-22)

Revelation 21:5-6 provides the theme for final two chapters of the book:

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment."

Here, God is declaring His purpose in purging the world of evil...to make all things new. He is the Alpha, the beginning, the Creator of all things. He is also the Omega, the end, the One who will bring His plan to completion.

If we look back to verse 1, we see what this completed plan looks like. John writes, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more." So, God's plan for restoring the earth is to create a new heaven and new earth.

We also read that the sea will be no more. For the people in John's day, the sea represented a place of chaos and danger. It's where the beast lived, so it's associated with evil. So, no more sea means no more evil. Also, we won't need the water from the sea, because going back to verse 6, we see that there will be a spring in the city that provides the water of life.

In chapter 21 and the first part of 22, John uses five images to describe what this new heaven and new earth will look like, and what this restoration will entail. These are actually themes that run throughout the Scripture but find their completion here in Revelation.

The Restoration of Marriage (21:2-4)

First, we see that God will restore His relationship with His people to the way it was meant to be. Here that relationship is depicted as marriage. Earlier, we saw that the Bride was prepared for the wedding, but that Christ had to remove the last of the evildoers before the wedding could take place. Now, Satan has been defeated and all the wicked have been judged. So, it's time for the wedding to begin. We see the Bride coming down, here described as the city of Jerusalem, but still referring to the people of God (v.2).

John then hears a voice from the throne in verse 3, which seems to indicate it's the voice of God. You could say that this is God's vow, His promise to His bride:

"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

What does this verse show about God's feelings for His Bride?

This shows the tender, loving care that God has for His Bride. He promises to dwell with His people. How amazing is that! The Almighty God, Creator of the universe, wants to dwell among us. He will also comfort His people, wiping away their tears and removing anything that would cause pain or sadness. Life on earth is hard and full of sorrow, but those things will one day pass away. What a beautiful future to look forward to!

God will restore His relationship with His people to the way it was intended to be. From the beginning, God created people in order to have a close, personal relationship with them, as seen in the Garden of Eden. God walked in the Garden with Adam and Eve, talking to them in a personal way. That relationship was ruined when Adam and Eve sinned. Ever since then, sin has kept us from having the intimate relationship with God that we were created for. However, once sin is removed from the earth, then that relationship will be returned to the way God intended. So, we can find great hope in knowing that one day we will dwell in the presence of God forever. Sin and sadness will never again plague us, and we can enjoy an intimate relationship with our God for all eternity.

The Restoration of Our Inheritance (21:7-8)

Next, John writes that the one who conquers will have a heritage as sons of God. Sons inherit the riches of their Father. Throughout Scripture God has promised an inheritance to His people, and it's often tied to land.

Thinking through the Old Testament, how does the promise of a land play an important part?

Adam and Eve were given land in the Garden, which they lost due to their rebellion. From that point on, God's plan was to restore a land to His people. God called Abraham to leave his country to go to a land God would give him. Abraham never saw that land, after many hundred years, the Israelites were finally given a land in which they could dwell in peace and prosperity. Nancy Guthrie writes, "To have land in the promised land was to have a share in all of God's promises to his people, all of his promised blessings."⁷ So, the inheritance was always intended to be more than just the land itself. It referred also to all the blessings and riches that God would pour out on His people.

The Israelites' Promised Land was foreshadowing the ultimate Promised Land that we are promised as our inheritance. Abraham understood that, as we read in Hebrews 11:8-10:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

⁷Guthrie, Nancy. *Blessed: Experiencing the Promise of the Book of Revelation*, 227.

Abraham was looking beyond the physical land to the greater reality, which Nancy Guthrie describes as follows:

One day, our greater Joshua is going to lead us into the land of which the promised land of Canaan was always a mere shadow. We will finally take full possession of our inheritance in the true land of milk and honey. This will be the land we've always longed for, the land that Canaan was always pointing toward, the land where we will finally be at home.⁸

Most of us have a pretty good home here on earth. We live comfortably, with all our needs met. We're generally happy here with our friends and loved ones. However, no matter how good things are here on earth, our best life is not now. Whatever riches and blessings we have now pale in comparison to what waits for us.

I don't know about you, but sometimes, in spite of my good life, I get a strong sense that this world is not my home. I watch the news and see the crazy stuff going on, and I know that I don't belong here. I've created a nice little bubble for myself, surrounded by like-minded people, and I'm comfortable there. But I don't fit in to the world at large. The things that people of the world value and the material riches that they seek don't interest me. But we see in Revelation 21:8 what their inheritance will be:

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

Sons inherit from their fathers. So, we see here that the sons of Satan will inherit his fate, an eternity in the lake of fire.

Our hope, however, is in the fact that our heavenly Father has something much, much better prepared for us than even the best things we have here on earth. We can eagerly await the day that we leave this world behind and receive our inheritance as sons (and daughters) of God.

The Restoration of the Community of God (21:9-14)

Next, John describes the Bride in terms of a city, the holy city of Jerusalem. This city reflects the glory of God in how beautiful it is, its radiance being like a rare jewel (v.10).

High walls surround the city. Walls usually are intended to keep things out, protecting what's inside. There's no need for walls here, because there is nothing outside to threaten the city. However, the walls symbolize the security that can be found inside the city. In this community, there will be nothing to fear. We will be perfectly safe there.

The city is a square, and each of the four walls have three gates. These gates are to have the names of the 12 tribes of Israel on them. The wall has 12 foundations, each with a name of one of the 12 apostles. This shows the unified nature of God's community. There will not be two

⁸Ibid.

communities: one for Old Testament Israel and one for the New Testament Church. Believers from all of history will live together in this one perfect community.

Also, there are gates facing north, south, east, and west, indicating that members of this community will be brought in from all over globe. This will be a multiethnic, multicultural community. We read of this earlier in chapter 7, where John saw the great multitude “from every nation, from all tribes and people and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes” (v.9).

How does this image of people from all over the world worshiping and living together differ from how things are today?

Cities today are certainly not safe, no matter the size. Even in Garden City, as small as it is, we’ve had our share of crazy people doing crazy things. We depend on the walls of our homes and the locks on our doors to keep us safe. And you sure don’t want to end up in the wrong part of town. Everybody knows which streets to avoid in their hometown.

Communities are also often segregated, hence Chinatown and Little Italy. In the South, and probably other places, communities are still segregated by race. There’s often tension between the different races. Even churches tend to segregate based on ethnicity and race. It’s rare to find a truly multicultural church, at least in my experience.

But this is not how God meant for it to be. We can find hope in the fact that in the New Jerusalem, we will experience community the way God intended. We will not have to live in fear that other people will cause us harm. Race and skin color will no longer matter. We will live in perfect peace with everyone, and together, as one united community, we will reflect the beauty and glory of God.

The Restoration of the Temple (21:15-27)

John goes on to describe the New Jerusalem, but the description here indicates that the city will actually be like a temple. First, we see an angel measuring the dimensions of the city (v.15). John writes that the length, width, and height are all equal (v.16), which actually makes the city a cube.

That’s significant, because in the tabernacle built by the Israelites in the wilderness, the Most Holy Place, or the Holy of Holies, was the part of the tabernacle where God came down to dwell with His people. It was a perfect cube, measuring 15x15x15 feet. When Solomon built the Temple later, the dimensions of this Most Holy Place was still cubic, but doubled from the tabernacle; so it was 30x30x30 feet.⁹

In the tabernacle and the temple, only the high priest was allowed in the Most Holy Place. What John’s vision shows, though, is that the whole earth will become the Most Holy Place. God will dwell in the midst of His people, and we will no longer need a priest to intercede for us.

⁹<https://www.internationalstandardbible.com/H/holy-of-holies.html>

Next, John describes the splendor of the city. It will be pure gold, and adorned with a variety of jewels, again reflecting the glory of God. Again, our thoughts should go back to Solomon's Temple, which was completely covered in gold (1 Kings 6). Also, King David had set aside "all sorts of precious stones and marble" (1 Chronicles 29:2). The stones listed in Revelation 21 are also similar to those that would have been worn on Aaron's breastplate¹⁰

John has been describing the city as a temple, but in verse 22, John states, "I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb."

Why is the temple not needed in the New Jerusalem?

In the Old Testament, the temple was meant to be a holy place where a holy God could dwell amongst an unholy people. In the New Jerusalem, a temple is no longer necessary, because everyone will be perfectly holy. Also, Solomon's Temple was only temporary. It was destroyed in 586 B.C. when the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem and plundered the Temple. However, John writes of this heavenly temple, "Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life" (v.27). This temple will never be destroyed, and nothing will ever defile the purity and holiness of this city.

Also, there will be no sun or moon because God and Jesus will provide their light to the city (v.23-24). Throughout Scripture, light is associated with righteousness. So, everyone in this city will walk in the light of Christ, in perfect righteousness.

Sometimes, in this dark world, God seems so far away. It seems like the light of Christ is waning, and the darkness is spreading. However, our hope is found in knowing that one day we will dwell in the perfect light of God's holiness and righteousness. We will enjoy God's presence in His Holy Temple where nothing unclean can ever affect us again.

The Restoration of the Garden (22:1-5)

Finally, in Revelation 22:1-5, John describes the garden that's in the city. This garden will have a river flowing through it, the river of life that flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb (v.1). This river provides the water that Jesus offered the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4. Jesus says of this water, "The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14).

The heavenly garden will also have in it the tree of life (v.2). Remember this tree was originally in the Garden of Eden. If Adam and Eve had obeyed God's command, they would have been allowed to eat from the Tree of Life and live forever. However, when they sinned, they were sent from the Garden so they wouldn't eat of this tree.

Now, the Tree of Life is located in this heavenly garden, and we will all be able to eat of it. The fact that it yields twelve different fruits, one each month, symbolizes that the tree doesn't just

¹⁰Poythress, 191.

provide—it will provide complete and abundant satisfaction. The leaves of this tree are healing (v.2). Nancy Guthrie says that all the ways that sin has disfigured and diseased us will be healed.¹¹

There will no longer be any curse because the effects of the curse will have been undone. In this garden, things will go back to the way they were created to be in the original garden, before the Fall. God will dwell in the garden on His throne, and His servants will worship Him and the Lamb face-to-face. There will be no more night, or darkness, which is symbolic of unrighteousness. We already saw that we will walk in the light of Christ's righteousness.

Unfortunately, in this life we're surrounded by sickness and death. However, we can find hope in the promise that there will come a day when our bodies will no longer be susceptible to illness. There's coming a day when death will no longer be a threat. We will eat of the tree of life and drink from the river of life and live forever, completely healed and completely satisfied in this garden of God.

Epilogue (22:6-21)

Now we come to the final verses of the book, what's considered the epilogue. The focus of these verses is the fact that Jesus is coming soon, but there are several good reminders for us in this passage.

1. We're reminded of the trustworthiness of the book (v.6). John is told again that these words are trustworthy and true. He's reminded of the source of this revelation...it came from God Himself through an angel to show what must soon take place. As we've already discussed, the events of the book will happen "soon" in comparison to previous prophecy, particularly Daniel, which would occur in the last days. What was far off for Daniel, is soon for us because we are living in the last days, inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Christ.
2. We're reminded of the importance of keeping the words of this book (v.7). It's not enough to just read Revelation. It's not even enough to study it and be able to explain every single image and symbol in the book. We must live according to what it says. We must remain faithful to Christ. We must resist the seduction of Babylon. We must know the truth so we can recognize the deceit of the false prophet. We should be led to worship God in light of what we've learned. We should long for a day when all evil will be overcome and we will dwell in the presence of God forever. We should be a hopeful, joyful people considering the inheritance that will be ours. There are so many ways that this book can affect the way we live.
3. We're also reminded that God and the Lamb are the only Ones worthy of our worship (v.8-9). John is so overwhelmed by what he had seen and heard that he falls down to worship the angel bringing him the message. However, the angel rebukes him. Angels are created beings just like us. Throughout Revelation, we've seen that people are tempted to worship all kinds of things, but the angel makes it simple. "Worship God," he says. Period.

¹¹Guthrie, 235.

4. We're reminded to persevere in spite of opposition (v.10-11). John is told not to seal up the words in the book, for the time is near. This is an allusion to Daniel 12:4, only Daniel is told to "shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end." Again, this shows that what was far off to Daniel is now near to us. Going back to Revelation, John is told, "Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy." This alludes to Daniel 12:10a, where Daniel is told, "Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked shall act wickedly." The point is that we need to read, study, live out, and even share what's in this book. We know the horrible judgment that awaits unbelievers, and we should want to warn people about it. Not everyone will respond positively. Some will purify themselves, but many others will continue in their evil ways. However, we can't let those who reject the truth stop us from sharing that truth.

5. We're reminded that judgment is coming (v.12-15). Jesus Himself says, "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done." Matthew 25:31-46 is a beautiful description of this:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Then they also will answer, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?" Then he will answer them, saying, "Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

This is exactly what we see in Revelation. Jesus will judge according to our actions. Those who have washed their robes and served Christ will be blessed to enter the city. Those who are still wearing their filthy rags of unrighteousness will be left outside the gate, sent to eternal punishment.

6. We're also reminded of who Christ is (v.16). Jesus alludes to two Old Testament prophecies, claiming to be the fulfillment of both. The first is Isaiah 11:1, where we read that a shoot will come from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots that will bear fruit. Jesse was the father of King David, so this is alluding to a descendent of David. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on this future king, and he will possess the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and fear of the Lord. He will judge with righteousness and equity. He shall also "strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked." Jesus is saying that He is this king, and the description definitely fits what we've read about Him in Revelation.

The second prophecy that Jesus alludes to is Numbers 24:17, where Balaam issues the following prophecy, "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel." Balaam goes on to say that this figure will defeat all of his enemies. The fact that he will come holding a scepter again indicates that he will be a king. Jesus claims to be this star, the bright morning star. Nancy Guthrie writes, "Jesus is declaring that when he comes as king, it will be the dawning of a new day. He will shine like a bright morning star over a new creation. This will be God's eternal day that will never end."¹²

7. We're reminded to invite others to the marriage supper (v.17). Remember in chapter 19, verse 9, the angel tells John to write, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." It's by invitation only, and we are to be issuing the invitations. Paul puts it another way:

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

People cannot respond to the good news if they never hear it. Our job is to tell others. With the Spirit and the Bride, we are to say, "Come." We're to tell people where to find the living water. It's free to all who desire it, but they have to know where to get it. Of course, as we've already said, not everyone will want to come. Not everyone will want to drink of this water. But we are to tell people and leave it up to God who actually comes.

8. We're reminded to be faithful to the Word (v.18-19). We're not to add to or take away from what's in this book. This is dire warning with severe consequences. If you add to the book, God will add to you the plagues of Egypt. If you take away from the book, God will take away your share in the tree of life and in the holy city. This is probably a reaction to the false teaching and the false prophets that were plaguing the church at this time. Remember back in the letters to the churches, there were those who were deceiving the people and leading them astray. False teaching is no joke. It's serious and it can have serious, even deadly consequences.

¹²Guthrie, 247.

9. Finally, we're reminded that the grace of God will sustain us until Christ comes again (v.20-21). Jesus is coming back; of that we can be certain. Like John, we should long to see that day. "Come, Lord Jesus!" should be our prayer. We know from our study that we will face trials and hardships, even persecution as we await his return, but God will give us the grace to overcome. He will grant us the necessary strength to patiently endure until He returns or calls us home.