

## WEEK TEN INTRO

### THE MILLENNIUM

*Begin by asking God to open your eyes and heart through the Holy Spirit. Then, read Revelation 20:1-10 slowly three times. As you do, use a pen or pencil to mark anything that is noteworthy to you: repeated words and phrases, specific attributes of God or particular phrases or concepts that are puzzling.*

### REVELATION 20:1-10 (ESV)

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. 2 And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

4 Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. 6 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 Defeat of Satan

7 And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. 9 And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, 10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

**The millennium.** It's a term that refers to the 1,000 year period (either symbolic or literal) that is depicted here in Revelation 20. Christians throughout the years have come to this passage as they've read the book of Revelation, and it's shaped how the Church has thought about the future, about Christ's return, and about what we might expect about what is coming. This is a conversation that is important (and complicated!) enough that we wanted to devote some time and space to focus only on what is happening here in Revelation 20. As Christians have thought, prayed, and wrestled with this text they have come to three major conclusions about what is going on here. But before we look at those three options - and make an argument for one of those three - a couple of ground rules for this and other biblical 'hot topics.'

*Charity.* The millennium is one example among many topics that Christians of good intention disagree about. While these issues are important because truth is important, we come to these conversations with the understanding that they are secondary to the central beliefs of the faith: God's Triune nature, the deity of Christ, salvation through Jesus alone, and the authority of Scripture. If we disagree, we disagree as those who know we are first and foremost brothers and sisters in Christ. Because of this, we'll treat one another with love and charity, knowing that we all are seeking the Kingdom first.

*Praxis.* One danger with disagreements like this is that we can become 'experts' who love to hear the sound of our own voice but who have forgotten that belief informs practice and orthodoxy drives orthopraxy. As we've read Revelation together, we've seen how John is always showing us what Revelation means for us, right here and right now. And so with the Millennium, we want to remind ourselves that speculation which doesn't help us obey and follow Jesus is ultimately unhelpful. How we read the Bible should help us to live faithfully - and not make us prideful about our theological positions.

With that in mind, let's look at Revelation 20 together. This passage is preceded by the great wedding feast of the lamb that takes place in Revelation 19:9-10 and then the great worldwide battle that takes place in Revelation 19:11-21. While it is always crucial for us to understand context, we must keep in mind that in Revelation what takes place immediately before or after a particular passage doesn't necessarily take place chronologically before or after; the visions can often be different angles or perspectives on the same realities. While we're coming to the end of Revelation and thus can expect to find ourselves thinking about "the end," that doesn't necessarily mean we can read what happens in Revelation 20 as coming chronologically after Revelation 19.

There are three basic sections to Revelation 20:1-10. First, there is the binding of Satan in Revelation 20:1-3, with a time of 1,000 years set on his bondage. Second, in Revelation 20:4-6 there is a description of those 1,000 years, where there's a description of the resurrection

of those who have followed Jesus. And third and finally, there is a great battle that takes place at the end of the millennium in 20:7-10. This battle marks the last real conflict of the book of Revelation; in the subsequent verse of chapter 20 we find that the final judgment has taken place and all things are being made new at last.

The question that Christians have pondered throughout the centuries is, "What is the relationship between the return of Jesus and the millennium?" While not every Christian has strong opinions about this and it is difficult to pigeonhole every single idea that every single Christian has had about this over the years, there are three main proposals: premillennial, postmillennial, and amillennial.

*Premillennial.* The premillennial position states that the second coming of Jesus Christ takes place before the millennium that we see here in Revelation 20. The second coming of Jesus is described in Revelation 19, and after Jesus' visible return he raises a portion of humanity who trust in him to reign with him for 1,000 years. At the end of those 1,000 years the final judgement takes place, and the rest of humanity is judged. The premillennial position is often accompanied by belief in the rapture (an interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-19), which takes place in some relation to a period of tribulation in human history. Sometimes premillennial interpretations of Revelation 20 accompany a way of thinking about biblical history called "dispensationalism," but not necessarily so. As you can see, there are a number of complicated ways to think even about this one option! Many people are most familiar with premillennialism through popularizations such as the Left Behind series or Hal Lindsey's Late, Great Planet Earth, but these are just two of many ways one could be premillennial.

*Postmillennial.* In this view, Jesus Christ's return takes place - that's right, you guessed it - after the millennium described in Revelation 20. This interpretation focuses on the binding of Satan that takes place in Revelation 20:2-3. Satan's binding takes place in and through Jesus' earthly ministry, and this inaugurates a work in human history where God's Kingdom continually expands and the vast majority of humanity comes to trust in Jesus. In a postmillennial view, the Kingdom comes in human history through the proclamation of the Gospel and the conversion of men and women to trust in Jesus in such a way that the fullness of God's reign is enjoyed before his return. By this view, the millennium of Revelation 20 will one day be experienced on earth and in the course of normal human history. At the end of this 1,000 year period, Jesus will return, raise all of humanity to judgment and bring the new heavens and the new earth. Many people with Presbyterian and Reformed sympathies are postmillennial.

*Amillennial.* In distinction to pre- and postmillennialism, the amillennialist position states that there will be no 1,000 year period of human history and that what Revelation 20 describes

is, like much else in Revelation, pointing symbolically to spiritual truths and not to precise historical events. The binding of Satan in 20:2-3 describes the victory won through Jesus's life and death, and the millennium is what Christians here and now are experiencing as they possess spiritual authority and victory over their enemies through Jesus. Revelation 20:7-10 describes Jesus' return and the final judgment. This is just another angle and perspective on the same battle that we have just seen in Revelation 19:17-21.

Each of these views is held by faithful followers of Jesus, and you would likely find members of our own church who hold to each. In this study of Revelation, we believe that Revelation points us to an amillennial position. There are a number of reasons why we have come to this conclusion: 1) The way in which Revelation chooses to circle back around the same concepts from different angles, as we saw in the sets of seven from Revelation 6-16. Revelation 19 and 20 both echo the same biblical passage (Ezekiel 37-39) and the battles are described with similar language. The image of binding evil with a key has also been repeated before. 2) The concept of the binding of Satan is used by Jesus multiple times to describe his own ministry (Matthew 12:29, Mark 3:27, Luke 10:18-29, John 12:31) and this leads us to identify Revelation 20:2-3 with his earthly mission. 3) The larger interpretation fits with what we have so far seen to be the major theme of Revelation: how Christians can faithfully endure the trials of human history in the knowledge that their enemy has been defeated, that those who have died will be vindicated, and that the future is certain.

That final point - Revelation's consistent message is even when all around us seems out of control, the Lamb remains on the throne - is worth lingering on for a moment. Christians come to their millennial convictions for any number of reasons. It may be because of the popular imagination that our culture has about the end times, it may be because of what we were (or weren't) taught growing up, or it may be because of what we hope will be true. But Scripture should first and foremost be our guide. The danger of any of these views is that they make a false promise about the nature of the ordinary Christian life. We may think that God will rapture us out of suffering (as some premillennials might believe); we may believe that history will progressively get better and evil will just go away (as some postmillennials might believe); or we may think that we could simply spiritualize away the realities that Scripture is pointing to (as some amillennials might do). We hope and pray that whatever conclusions we all come to are based on our study of Scripture and not on our fears, anxieties, or our wishes for a life free from suffering.

In good faith, Christians can engage in deep study and find themselves disagreeing about these things. What we do know, however, is that Jesus will be faithful to those who persevere and that history is in his hands. What a good way to frame our next passage - Revelation 21!

### EVERYTHING SAD UNTRUE

Imagine yourself on a long journey: a cross-country drive, a strenuous hike, a day full of airline connections, car rentals, and navigating confusing directions. As the day draws to a close, you're exhausted and worn out, beginning to regret that you ever made this journey at all. Then suddenly in the horizon you see a sign that you're almost there: a mile marker, the crest of the final ascent back to the trailhead, or a billboard that shows the luxuries of your destination. Strength and resolve flood your body, and you press on with renewed resolve to arrive at your long-desired destination.

Revelation 21-22 is the same to you and to me. It is the culmination not just of John's Apocalypse but the entire biblical story and all of human history. In this chapter we are given a picture of our long-awaited destination, of the rest and joy and peace that we long for. This is the home for which we were made and the only joy that can fill our hearts.

We'll look at this closing section of Revelation in three parts: Revelation 21:1-9, 21:10-23, and 21:24-22:5. As we draw to the end of the book of Revelation, let's open our hearts to God's desire to renew and strengthen us on the way to our true home.

## PERSONAL STUDY PART I: THE NEW HEAVEN & THE NEW EARTH

*Begin by asking God to open your eyes and heart through the Holy Spirit. Then, read Revelation 21:1-9 slowly two times. As you do, use a pen or pencil to mark anything that is noteworthy to you: repeated words and phrases, specific attributes of God or particular phrases or concepts that are puzzling.*

### REVELATION 21:1-9 (ESV)

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. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "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. 4 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."

5 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." 6 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. 7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 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."

The New Jerusalem

9 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."

The tone of Revelation 21 brings us a different melody than we've heard in this book thus far. Gone is the dissonance of conflict and struggle. Now, finally, there is no more strife. We can breathe easy and rest in the goodness and beauty that is promised to us here.

This comes, of course on the heels of the final judgment that we see at the end of chapter 20. [Read Revelation 20:11-15.](#)

This is a sobering reality that we can't ignore or simply pass over. When John sees "both great and small" standing before the great white throne with books about their deeds being opened, he is telling us that each and every person will have to stand and give an account before the Judge. But thankfully there is also another book opened - the book of life. If Jesus has graciously written your name in his book of life, then you will be judged not according to all of your actions, but instead by the righteous acts of Jesus. But those who have not sought refuge in Jesus will have to face judgment according to their own actions which will lead to the same destiny as the dragon and the beast - the lake of fire (19:20). This is the destination for everything and everyone accursed. Seeing the final judgment in connection to Revelation 21 helps us to understand why judgment is a part of the good news of the Gospel and not the whims of some sort of capricious, hateful deity. God does away with evil so that he can allow good to flourish. There is no safety and no peace without final judgment on evil. We can't get to the good promises of Revelation 21 without the judgement and removal of evil in Revelation 20.

Revelation 21:1 begins with a vision of the glorious reality that awaits those whose names have been written in the book of life : a new heaven and a new earth. But this newness isn't some unexpected thing that God brings about. It's part of a promise he made long ago even before Jesus' arrival and ministry, in the book of Isaiah. [Read Isaiah 65:17-25.](#)

As you read Isaiah 65, what part of this vision resonates most deeply with you? As you read, what promise is most beautiful and moving for you?

There is so much goodness and beauty in this new creation, that the vision must necessarily mix its metaphors in order to capture as much of the glory of what we see here. We see in Revelation 21:1-2 three different descriptions of this new reality. Take a moment to note each one then describe what you think each picture communicates (worry less about being 100% correct and focus more about meditating on these images and what they mean):

<i>Verse</i>	<i>Image</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>"Then I saw a..." (21:1)</i>		
<i>"And I saw the..." (21:2)</i>		
<i>"... prepared as a " (21:2)</i>		

We'll return to the other two images as we continue on through Revelation, but let's look now at the third image John is given: the bride. We've already seen this in our study of Revelation 19, but let's look again at this picture of the new future that we are promised in Scripture. Like all of these images, we find ourselves pulling on a thread that runs throughout the entire Bible. We could go as far back as Genesis 2, but let's look instead at what we've all realized by now is one of Revelation's favorite books: Isaiah. Read Isaiah 54:4-8.

As you think about this image, why do you think a marriage is such a powerful image of the Gospel? Whether you are married or not, or your experience of marriage has been positive or not, whether you are a man or a woman... why do you think Scripture chooses again and again to describe our relationship with God in this way?

We've already seen the inverse picture of marriage throughout this book in the description of Jezebel in the letter to Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29) and in the description of Babylon the prostitute. Those images show us the negative aspect of what is meant to be a positive reality, and in so doing they show us our unfaithfulness that is met with God's faithfulness. Take a few moments to reflect on this quote from Michael Wilcock:

"Well would it be for the church in her present unlovely state if she could recapture first a sense of awe appropriate to a vision of of such splendor; then a sense of amazement that she, unworthy as she is, should be raised to a place of honor by her beloved Husband in the wedding feast in heaven; and finally a sense of determination that so far as in her lies, she will be worthy."

At this moment, God's love for us comes to us not because we are worthy, but in unmerited grace. But there will be a day when we will be made worthy - "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (21:2).

Will this preparation come from our own abilities and strength, or from God?

There is just so much here that we can't talk about all of the good things that God has in store for us. But take a few moments to look at Revelation 21:3-7. Of all the promises about our future state, which one of these is the one you long for most right now? Where is the Good News, good news to you?

## PERSONAL STUDY PART II: A CITY WITH NO TEMPLE

*Begin by asking God to open your eyes and heart through the Holy Spirit. Then, read Revelation 21:10-23 slowly two times. As you do, use a pen or pencil to mark anything that is noteworthy to you: repeated words and phrases, specific attributes of God or particular phrases or concepts that are puzzling.*

We see in this section of Revelation 21 another of the three images that we noted from Revelation 21:1-2: the heavenly city. This image also - to no one's surprise at this point - is drawn from the Old Testament. Ezekiel 40-48 is another vision of a new city that is given to God's people as a promise of its future. God is keeping the promise he made to his people long ago.

In verses 12 and 14 we see that there are names written on the new city. What are those names and when you add them together, what do you get?

We came across that number before, way back in Revelation 4:4. Do you remember what they symbolized there?

As we've seen elsewhere in the book of Revelation, John sees images that point to deeper realities. Here he sees the new Jerusalem, and inscribed on the city there are the names of the tribes of Israel (a sign of the Old Testament people of God) and the names of the apostles (a sign of the church in the New Testament). Taken together - and in connection to Revelation 4:4 - we see that one of the main aspects of the new creation is the Church.

When you think about heaven and the new creation, is this one of the first things that comes to mind? Does your understanding of heaven tend to be more private or 'social' like this one?

What would it mean for you right now to think about God's ultimate goal in history to build a 'city' out of his church? How does that challenge how you currently understand the Christian life?

In the world of the Bible, when God asked someone to count or measure something, it was a sign of security. Through measurements, God walks his people through the height, breadth, length and depth of his promises to them. God's command to measure is an invitation to trace the extent of his promises.

As you read Revelation 21:15-17, what does God tell the angel to do in John's presence? What does this mean about the new Jerusalem? What does it mean about the future of the Church?

In Revelation 21:18-21 we are told about the kinds of materials that the city has been made out of. These are stones that the Bible has mentioned before. We can use our imaginations to try to imagine just how brilliant and glorious the reality that John is describing is. But like so much else in this book, Revelation is also pointing us back to an image that has already been used in the Bible. Look at Exodus 28:17-21 and note the common list and what the text tells us these stones represent.

These stones were placed on the ephod that the priest wore into the Holy of Holies, where the presence of God dwelt. The priest's actions - his offerings and the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement - were how God's people prepared themselves for God's presence. Here in Revelation, those elements are built into the very foundation of the city itself.

What does this tell us about God's presence in this new city? If the city is like the Holy of Holies, what does this mean for God's presence to it?

Speaking of God's presence to the city, John sees something absolutely amazing in verses 22 and 23. In the Old Testament, God's presence was occasional and mediated through the continual sacrifices that took place during Temple worship. Here in verse 22, we are told about the Temple and also about the Lamb's presence to his people.

What does this tell us about God's presence in the new city?

Writing about these images, Michael Groman says this: "The boundary between heaven and earth - God's reality/abode and ours - is permanently removed. [Future] life is marked by God's perpetual perceptible presence - a state of permanent incarnation, so to speak. This is, in fact, the most significant characteristic of the New Jerusalem: divine presence in all its fullness and glory."

Meditate on this reality for a bit. What would the "perpetual perceptible presence" of the Lord be like and mean for you?

## PERSONAL STUDY PART III: THE HEALING OF THE NATIONS

*Begin by asking God to open your eyes and heart through the Holy Spirit. Then, read Revelation 21:24-22:5 slowly two times. As you do, use a pen or pencil to mark anything that is noteworthy to you: repeated words and phrases, specific attributes of God or particular phrases or concepts that are puzzling.*

### REVELATION 21:24-22:5 (ESV)

24 By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, 25 and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. 26 They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. 27 But 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.

#### The River of Life

22 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life<sup>[b]</sup> with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Our vision has been focused on the new Jerusalem, but here in this section we see two different things happening within the city. On the one hand, we see people come into the city - the nations and the kings of the earth. On the other hand, we see a river flowing from the throne of God. Let's look at each of these images in turn.

In verse 24-27, we see the nations coming into the holy city. John tells us how they come into the city in verse 24, which is an echo of something Jesus said to his disciples in the Sermon of the Mount: "You are the light of the world." What hope does the Christian faith give to those who come to believe that it is true?

Think for a moment about people in your life who need the light of Lamb in order to walk in light and not in darkness? Write their names down and pray that they will know the good, life-giving reality of truth.

John tells us that those who come into the city are the nations and the kings of the nations. These are people who we've met before in Revelation. Look back to see where we've heard about these people before: Revelation 6:15, 13:7, 16:14, 16:18, 16:19. In what light are these people described in Revelation?

And yet here in Revelation 21:24-27, we see those same people entering the new Jerusalem, citizens of the heavenly city. It's clear that these people have been made clean (v. 27), and that is something that can only take place through Jesus. It's also clear that there is a judgment on those who are finally opposed to God (20:11-15). But it's also just as clear that those who were once opposed to God, enslaved to Babylon, and making war on the Lamb have finally been welcomed. What kind of picture does this give you about God's grace and mercy?

In Revelation 22:1-5 we have a final picture of the new Jerusalem. We're still looking at a city, but there's something very different about this city than we might expect. What do we see running through the city, and then what do we see on either side of that?

What a seemingly strange picture we're given here. It's a city... but there's a garden in the middle of the city. Why would there be a garden here?

Read Genesis 2:5-17. Where do you see echoes of Genesis 2 in Revelation 22?

The Bible begins in a garden. The Bible ends in a city-garden. The work that God began in the beginning he sees through to completion. The promises that he's made, he's faithful to.

Take a few moments to ponder this long, wonderful story that God has written and how he's been faithful to promises even though we have rebelled and broken his creation. Write down a prayer of thanksgiving to God for what this faithfulness reveals about who he is for you personally.

The closing verses of this section speak to the coming intimacy of God and his people. "They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads" (Rev 22:4). Up until this point, it has not been possible for man to see the face of God and live. Even back in Exodus, Moses longed to see the glory of God. But because of the sinfulness of man compared to the holiness of God, Moses was only allowed to see his back as the glory of the Lord passed by (Exodus 33:22-23).

How is it now possible in the new heavens and the new earth for us to see God's face? Look at Revelation 22:3. Who is on the throne?

This Lamb who is reigning on the throne is the Lamb who was slain, by whose blood you have been ransomed for God (Rev 5:9). And the name that now identifies everything about you is Jesus. You are no longer known by all the shameful deeds that would have made you unable to see God's face without dying. This is the beautiful intimacy afforded to the Bride of Christ. Identified as His. Free to enjoy the wonder and glory of his face. Bathed in light, never to be caught in darkness again. And able to enjoy this intimacy forever and ever.

Finish your time today in praise and adoration. Write about the goodness, beauty and freedom that comes when we will see his face and live!

## WEEK ELEVEN

### LEAVE THE CURTAIN OPEN

Have you ever found yourself immersed in such a beautiful performance that you long for it to never end? And yet with the conflict resolved and the music growing more peaceful, you realize it is about time for the actors to bow and the curtain to fall. Perhaps you have some of those same feelings as Satan has been defeated, the new heaven and the new earth are here and the Lamb is with his people. If you're holding your Bible open in your hands, then at this point you realize that almost all of it is being held in your left hand and only a page remains in your right. We are at the end of God's written, revealed Word to us. It has been a beautiful journey through Revelation - even a tour throughout all of Scripture - as we see that every promise of God is true and is now accomplished through Jesus. And though it is somewhat bittersweet that our study (this time) of Revelation is nearing its completion, this is one story where the curtain gets to stay up. In this final section, the angel will instruct John not to close anything. This book is the unveiling of Jesus Christ and what we need most is for the curtain to remain open so that we never lose sight of all that we've seen of Jesus in His Word.

*Begin by asking God to open your eyes and heart through the Holy Spirit. Then, read Revelation 22:6-21 slowly two times. As you do, use a pen or pencil to mark anything that is noteworthy to you: repeated words and phrases, specific attributes of God or particular phrases or concepts that are puzzling.*

## REVELATION 22:6-21 (ESV)

6 And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."

7 "And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, 9 but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

10 And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. 11 Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy."

12 "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. 15 Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

16 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

17 The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

## PERSONAL STUDY PART I: THE EPILOGUE

Maybe you can still recall your early days of learning how to write, whereby your English teacher instructed you that your concluding paragraph should restate the main idea(s) of your introduction. So perhaps as you read through this ending section of Revelation, referred to as the Epilogue, it sounded quite familiar with what you read at the very outset of the book. Let's take a moment and compare what ideas and themes from the introduction are repeated here in the closing of Revelation.

QUESTIONS	PROLOGUE	EPILOGUE
<i>WHY GIVEN?</i>	<i>Rev 1:1</i>	<i>Rev. 22:6</i>
<i>WHEN?</i>	<i>Rev 1:1</i>	<i>Rev. 22:6</i>
<i>BLESSED HOW?</i>	<i>Rev 1:3</i>	<i>Rev. 22:7</i>
<i>JOHN'S TESTIMONY</i>	<i>Rev 1:2</i>	<i>Rev. 22:8</i>
<i>WHY KEEP IT?</i>	<i>Rev 1:3</i>	<i>Rev. 22:10</i>
<i>WHO GOD/ JESUS IS</i>	<i>Rev 1:8</i>	<i>Rev. 22:13</i>

At the very beginning of our study of Revelation, we noted that this book offers a blessing to all those who read, hear and keep the words of this prophecy. And now as we come to the end of dramatic vision after dramatic vision, the angel reminds John (and us) that this promised blessing still holds true for all those who keep what is written in this book.

Why do you think we might need a reminder that everything we have heard and seen in this book is in fact true and trustworthy AND it offers us the best opportunity to be blessed?

Throughout the book of Revelation, Jesus reminds us that he and his words can be counted on. When writing to the church in Laodicea, Jesus is the faithful and true witness (Rev 3:14). In the final battle, Jesus rides in seated on a white horse and is called Faithful and True (Rev 19:11). When Jesus promises that he is making all things new he instructs John to write it down because his words are trustworthy and true (Rev 21:5). And how much our hearts need this reminder of his faithfulness! Many times life can make us feel that the good guys aren't the ones winning. Days when we've tried our hardest to be faithful spouses, good parents, or devoted workers can end up in disappointments. When our hearts can wonder if it's really worth it to keep being faithful during difficult days, Revelation sings to us about the faithfulness of Jesus and reminds our shaky faith that he can indeed be trusted.

Is there a current trial, difficult relationship or area of disappointment in which you need to hear that the promises of Jesus are trustworthy and true?

Another phrase that is repeated in the closing verses of Revelation is **"I am coming soon."** Go back and read Revelation 22:6-21. Underline all the times Jesus makes this declaration.

Three times in just 15 verses, Jesus declares, "I am coming soon!" He does not say, "I *will* come soon" or "*hopefully* I can make it." Instead, Jesus uses the Greek present indicative of the verb to come or to enter in. In Greek, this tense presents facts. It tells the reader what's

happening. So what's up in 2020? Jesus is in the process of coming, that's what's up. It is not that one distant day down the road Jesus will break in upon the scene, but for now he's passive and far away. Rather, this active tense lets us know that even right now, Jesus is moving towards us and moving towards his promise to make all things new.

We have frequently reminded ourselves throughout this book that Revelation is not meant to be a tool given to us to decipher future events. Instead, it is the *apokalypsis* of Jesus Christ (Rev 1:1) - the unveiling of the true nature of Jesus and His kingdom. In God's kindness, He has opened up the heavenly curtain so that we might see things that we miss when we are only focused on an earthly perspective. And one of the things that does not seem immediately perceptible to us is the fact that Jesus is, right now, on the move. Just as Jesus could promise John's audience 2000 years ago that he is right now in the process of coming, so he speaks to us. We must not fall prey to the feeling that Jesus is distant and passive to our current events even when it feels like he is taking a long time to return. His kingdom is right now in the process of coming.

What difference does it make to you to think about Jesus is right now moving closer to us? In what current circumstances do you need to remind yourself that Jesus is already in the process of entering in so that it is made new?

These verses have repeatedly told us that Jesus is coming. But in order for his coming to be good news we must see the "Who" that is entering into our existence.

Read Rev 22:12. List all the declarations of who Jesus is:

At first glance, it might seem that all these designations of Jesus are really just saying the same thing. However, a closer look at the nuances of these words can deepen our understanding of who our Savior is.

**Alpha and Omega** - These are the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet. In Revelation 1:8, the Lord God declares his comprehensiveness such that anything that can be written or spoken, from the first to the last, all finds its fullness in him. And now, the book ends with

a very high view of Jesus Christ. The "I am" statement from Rev 1:8 that is true of God is seen to also be true of the Son, Jesus, in Rev 22:12.

**The First (*protos*) and the Last (*eschatos*)** - The word *protos* means first or best, as in the first in the order of importance. In English we get our word *prototype* which means the best after which all else will be patterned. The word *eschatos* means end, last or the uttermost. In English we get our word, *eschaton* and *eschatology* - the study of last things.

**The Beginning (*arche*) and the End (*telos*)** - The word *arche* means the first in rule and power, the commencement of everything. The Greek word *telos* means the desired end point, the goal, the ultimate aim of something.

Jesus is not merely being repetitive. Instead, he is giving us a glimpse of his fullness. Every word and promise finds its meaning in him. He is the first in importance of everything. Nothing else is better. Jesus is the pattern for all things. He is the uttermost destiny of all creation. Nothing could have any beginning point without him. And the goal and desired end point of all of creation, including you and me, is found in Jesus. That is how full he is. That is how comprehensive he is. And this is the One who promises us that he is coming soon. How could we want anyone other than the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end, to come for us?

After considering all of these designations that Jesus applies to himself, is there one that is particularly meaningful to you right now and why?

Jesus goes on in this last chapter of Revelation to offer even more designations for who he is. Read Revelation 22:16. List all the descriptions of Jesus in this verse:

### **The Root**

The words "root and descendant of David" would have been familiar to John's audience and would have reminded them of the words in Isaiah. [Read Isaiah 11](#). This passage speaks of one that comes from the line of Jesse (which will be the kingly Davidic line) that will lead to the Messiah. The preceding chapter of Isaiah speaks of a day of judgment whereby God's people

are brought to almost nothing. Only a remnant remains. And just when it seems that all hope is lost, life will spring from a stump. This branch comes from "his roots". He will judge with righteousness, strikes the earth with a rod from his mouth, wears righteousness as a belt, and faithfulness upon his loins.

Look back at Revelation 19. Let's see how Jesus fulfills these promises of the coming Messiah.

Revelation 19:11 - How will Jesus judge?

Revelation 19:15 - what comes from Jesus' mouth?

Revelation 19:11 - As Jesus rides in, what is he called?

Jesus certainly fulfills every promise that is made about being the branch that comes from Jesse. Yet Revelation 22:16 draws our attention to the fact that Jesus is also the root. Roots are the lifeline of plants. They deliver everything the plant needs for life. This is who Jesus is, both for David and also for the whole kingly rule of God's people. Jesus is the root, the lifeline, supplying all that is needed for the perfect ruling of God's people. He is the supplier and deliverer of everything God's people need for life. And as the root, he comes before any other shoots or branches. Jesus precedes David and also sustains the whole kingly line. The Root is a proclamation of Jesus' full divinity.

### **The Descendant of David**

But Jesus is also the physical descendant of David. Read Isaiah 9:6-7. God's people were promised that their Messiah, their rescuer, would be physically born out of the bloodline of David. Read Matthew 1:1. Jesus fulfills this promise and takes on flesh, being born into the physical family line of king David. This designation of Jesus as the "descendant of David" proclaims his full humanity.

One little phrase from our Lord. "I am the root and the descendant of David." He is all of it. He is the one who came before any hint of a Davidic line. He is the source from which perfect rule comes. He is the supplier and deliverer of the life needed for all the people within God's

kingdom. And he is willing to become like his people, taking on their flesh and becoming among them. Jesus is all that we need in a king.

What does it mean to you to know that Jesus is both the root and descendant of David?

### **The Bright Morning Star**

The phrase “bright morning star” (Rev 22:16) is a somewhat curious designation. Elsewhere in Scripture there is mention of a “day star”. However, this designation of day star in the Old Testament seems to be in reference to Satan. Read the following sections and write what you note is being said of this “day star.”

Read Isaiah 14:12-20

Read Ezekiel 28:11-19

Likewise, Revelation has described Satan as a fallen star, one who has been cast down out of the heavenly throne. Read the following sections and write what you note is being said of this star:

Revelation 9:1-6

Revelation 12:7-12

Now read 2 Corinthians 11:14. What is Satan described as doing?

All throughout the book of Revelation, Satan has been portrayed as attempting to imitate the ways of Jesus. But in all the ways he attempts to promise life, security and peace he only delivers darkness, destruction and death. John doesn't want his readers, or us, to be fooled by the one who only pretends to look like the light. Jesus is the real bright morning star.

In scientific terms, a morning star is a bright light in the sky and often it is the planet Venus. It is what becomes visible in the east just before sunrise. Think about the cycles of day and night. If you've ever woken up in the night and can't go back to sleep, you know what it is like to long to see that first ray of light. The night can feel as though it is dragging on and never going to end. But a morning star gives a sparkle of light that sets your heart to expect the coming of the sunrise, and with it, the glorious beauty that comes with the light of a new day.

So think about what this means for Jesus to remind a suffering people that he is the true and bright morning star! Just when the darkness feels like it will last forever - when the sadness, the pain and the uncertainty seem like they will never end - Jesus says look at me. I am right now that glimmer of light that tells your heart to hold on. I am surely coming and I am bringing a new day that is full of beauty, light and hope.

In what circumstance do you need to see Jesus as the bright morning star?

How does seeing Jesus as the bright morning star give you the ability to endure right now?

## **PERSONAL STUDY PART II: WHAT NOW?**

After finishing our current study of the book of Revelation it is good for us to consider what to do with all that the Lord has shown us. If the words of this prophecy were meant to show John's readers how to live in the midst of their current circumstances, then we also can find encouragement for how to live right now. Let's walk through some of the larger concepts from the whole book of Revelation that John draws our attention to in the closing words of this book.

### **VISIONS OF JESUS**

This book has contained vision after vision of Jesus and how he interacts with his people, comes in judgement, and provides life for his Bride. We've seen him in the midst of the lampstands, holding keys, standing as a lamb slain, opening scrolls, clothing his people, riding a white horse, conquering the beast, preparing a wedding feast, making all things new and giving the water of life. Even the ending verses of Revelation are Jesus providing us with pictures and descriptions of who he is (Alpha and Omega, root of David, the bright morning star).

Take time to look back through these beautiful depictions of Jesus that God has so graciously chosen to unveil for us throughout the entire book of Revelation. Does one or two of these images stand out to you? Write out a prayer to the Lord thanking him for the way that He demonstrates this particular aspect to you and how this strengthens you in your daily walk with him.

### **COME AND WASH OUR ROBES**

One of the words that both begins and ends the book of Revelation is "Blessed" or *makarioi*. In Greek, this adjective describes the happy ones or the people who are to be envied. Revelation 22:14 describes that the people who are actually in the most desirable position are "those who wash their robes." This phrase is present tense depicting an ongoing, continual washing. To be sure, we have had all of our sins forgiven once and for all through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Hebrews 10:14 confirms that "by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified."

We feel the tension that although we have been justified (declared righteous before God) we are still being sanctified (being made holy). We are not perfect yet. This world is not perfected yet. We soil our garments when we are not following after Jesus fully. When we partake in

what the world offers us rather than whole-heartedly following the commands of God, our garments need washing. And Revelation has been clear to declare to us that the only way our garments are made clean is from being washed in the blood of Jesus (Revelation 7:14). We must daily return to Jesus, confessing our sins and asking that he wash us so that we can continue on to follow him faithfully. And for those who come to him and confess their sins he freely offers forgiveness and cleanses them fully (1 John 1:9). This is a call for faithful perseverance in daily life lived out for Jesus, knowing that only by continually running to him, will we have what we need for life.

Come to Jesus. Take a moment to spend time in confession with the Lord. What currently tempts your heart away from being fully devoted to Jesus and following him completely? Write out a prayer of confession about this sin and also write out your thankfulness for the full cleansing power of the blood of Jesus for it.

## **AN INVITATION**

While believers are invited to come and daily cling to Jesus, there is also an invitation extended to the unbelieving world. The Bride of Christ (believers) join the Holy Spirit by inviting those on the outside to come to Jesus as well (Revelation 22:17). This has actually been one of the main roles of the church throughout the whole book of Revelation. The prologue introduced the idea that Jesus has made the church to be “priests to his God” (1:6). When the Church is depicted at the final battle they are dressed in linen priestly garments (19:14). The primary function of a priest is to be a mediator between God and man. The Church has been redeemed, not only that she might keep herself safe on the day of judgment, but also so that she might be a light for the nations. Therefore, Christians join the Lord in his mission that every tongue, tribe and language might hear the good news that Jesus is the only answer for every longing. We extend the call to “come” for anyone who is thirsty that they might “take the water of life without price.”

Read Isaiah 55.

This passage portrays the compassion of the Lord. He fully knows that we need “bread” to be sustained and “water” to quench our longings, yet we have no ability to get this from our own striving. And so rather than spend our toil on the empty things of this world that do not satisfy, there is an invitation to come and receive what must be accepted as a gift from God - the sacrificial life of Jesus, laid down for us, and now resurrected that we might enjoy life

with him forever! Perhaps you yourself are the one who needs to hear this sweet offer from the Lord. God knows that we are poor and do not have the ability to save ourselves. He holds out the invitation, right now, to come to Jesus. He is ready to offer all of himself that anyone who comes to him might be saved and thus be fully satisfied in him.

Who do you know that needs to hear this merciful invitation from the Lord that He offers us everything that we need, even though we have no ability to attain it on our own? Is there a friend, a family member, or neighbor who you can share the good news of Jesus with? Write out your prayer that the Lord would provide an opportunity for you to extend his invitation for eternal life to this person.

## **WORSHIP RIGHTLY**

To be sure, the theme of worship has shown up in every section of Revelation. The Prologue of Revelation calls for all glory to be given to Jesus, the one who loves us and has freed us from our sins (1:5). Every vision given to John that follows these opening words only serves to further the reasons for why he alone is worthy of our praise. Yet John makes it clear that many things vie for our worship. The seven churches demonstrate that there are many things that can lead us away from full worship of Jesus: losing our initial love for Jesus, trials and loss, fear of suffering, false teaching, sexual immorality, and apathy. Satan also attempts to turn our worship toward him and false imitations of all that Jesus offers. Wealth, beauty, comfort, economic security and political stability all attempt to seduce us into the worship of empty things.

Even good, religious things are not to be worshipped in and of themselves. As John receives his final vision we find him falling at the feet of the angel who had shown him these things (22:8). But the angel reminds John, and us, that there is only one response that is appropriate, "Worship God." This is a strong command. Every bit of our hearing and seeing from this book should lead us to fall down and worship. And if we've correctly perceived all that's been unveiled about Jesus from start to finish then the only response is to worship God alone.

How kind that the Lord allows the words of this prophecy to not be sealed up. We need the curtain to remain open. A hundred things dance before our eyes and play around in our minds. But Jesus commands us to "Look!" Look at him, who he is and the fact that he is coming soon (22:7, 22:12). The visions of him correct what our eyes are tempted to worship and the promises from him guard our imaginations so that we might long for his coming. To

be sure, we need the grace of Jesus Christ which John offers at the close of this book. May our hearts only worship the Lord so that we too cry out, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Conclude your time in prayer with the Lord. Worship him. Finish by writing how His Word to you in Revelation has led you to worship him more fully and thus to live for him faithfully.