

LESSON 12

THE CITY OF GLORY

BY RAY C. STEDMAN

Many of you are too young to remember this, but years ago, before World War II, there was a radio news broadcaster by the name of H. V. Kaltenborn. He always began his news broadcast with the words, "Well, we've got good news today!" That is the way I would like to start this last section of Revelation. It is indeed good news! The judgments are past, the terrible plagues upon the earth are ended. We begin with a view of heaven coming down to earth; a time when the prayers of God's people for centuries, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," will be answered.

Chapters 21 and 22 contain almost all the Bible records concerning the eternal state. Most of the prophetic passages of the Old Testament that picture a time of great blessing on earth refer to the thousand-year reign of our Lord which precedes this last great event. Very little is said in the Old Testament about heaven. But here it is in these chapters. Following the Great White Throne judgment, recorded in Chapter 20, John sees a whole new creation spring into being.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. {Rev 21:1-4 NIV}

What beautiful words! They bring us full circle, to the beginning of the Bible again. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." That creation is what is called here "the old heavens and the old earth." They shall pass away, as we are told, but a new heavens and a new earth are coming. It is the Apostle Peter who tells us what happens to the present heavens and earth. In Second Peter he says, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar. The elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare," {2 Pet 3:10}. That ends the old heavens, but now a new heavens and earth appear where Jesus will continue his reign, not only upon earth, but throughout the entire reach of the vast universe of God.

There are four statements in this opening paragraph that tell us the purpose of the new heavens and the new earth:

1. The first verse suggests strongly that the New Jerusalem, this great city that John describes, is to be the capital of the whole new universe. And it will be a universe greatly changed. It will not be like the one we have now. I do not believe that this means that God will eliminate the present heavens and earth but he changes it and cleanses it.

When we become Christians we become new creatures in Christ, but we are still the same persons, but now changed and cleansed. So also the old heavens and the old earth will be cleansed -- by fire.

We know today that the present universe in its farthest reaches (*even farther than the new Hubble telescope can show us*), is governed by

the same laws. One of them is the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the law of entropy, which says this present universe is running down. It is all decaying; losing its energy; it is growing cold. But in the new heavens and the new earth apparently that law is reversed. Instead of running down the universe begins to come together again. Instead of losing energy it will gain it and manifest a unity, stability, symmetry and beauty that the old heavens and earth never had.

One aspect of this, pictured here, is that there will be no more sea.

A man said to me last week, "I don't think I'm going to like the new heavens and the new earth, because I love the ocean." I understand that feeling. I love the ocean too.

But the one reason we have a salt sea that covers more than half of this planet is because it is God's great antiseptic to cleanse the earth and make life possible on earth. Had it not been for the ocean, and the salt in it particularly, life on this planet would have ceased many centuries ago. It is the ocean that purges, cleanses, and preserves it. The sea is an antiseptic in which all the pollution and filth that man pours into it is absorbed, cleansed and changed. But there will be no more pollution, no more filth, no more need for cleansing in the new universe. Though we are not told this, I think there will be large bodies of fresh water, larger even perhaps than the Great Lakes, that we may enjoy in that new heavens and new earth.

2. Then the second thing said here is, the New Jerusalem is called a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. Everyone loves that picture. We all love weddings. The climax is when the bride comes down the aisle, beautifully dressed for her husband! Everyone forgets that poor fellow waiting for her at the altar! Every eye is on the bride because she has prepared herself for weeks to meet her husband there.

This new city is called both a city and a woman, just as the false bride, "Mystery Babylon the Great," was both a city (*Rome*), and a woman. We have seen how that one was destroyed for its evil. A bride speaks of intimacy, and a city speaks of community. So we have a picture here

of the redeemed of God, each one given a body of glory empowered with limitless energy. When opportunity comes in that day you will not say, as we often say today, "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak," {Matt 26:41 NIV}. No, then you will be able to respond to every opportunity with a glorified, fresh and living body. We will live in close intimacy, not only with the Lord himself, but with each other as well.

I often think of that phrase in John's letters where he says, "It does not yet appear what we shall be," {1 Jn 3:2 KJV}. I keep looking in the mirror for signs of change in me. But what do I see? Wrinkles-and zits! But it won't be like that then. We will have bodies of glory and beauty that will be like his.

3. The third thing we are told here is that this will be the dwelling place of God. Isn't that marvelous? The home of God! The place where God lives, in his people. This is when the name "Immanuel" ("*God with us*"), will be fulfilled, and when the New Covenant will be fully worked out, "They shall be my people, and I will be their God," {Jer 24:7 KJV}. It is all in this beautiful setting. Heaven, someone has well said, is the place of "no more" -- no more death, no more sorrow, no more parting, no more pain, no more tears, no more evil!

As a young Christian I learned a song which I often sing to myself even yet:

*There's no disappointment in heaven,
No weariness, sorrow, no pain,
No hearts that are bleeding and broken,
No song with a minor refrain.
The clouds of our earthly horizon
Shall never appear in the sky.
But all will be sunshine and gladness,
With never a sob nor a sigh.*

A wonderful hope, isn't it? It is so beautiful that it is even hard to believe. I think John felt that way for he is given at this point certain words of assurance to help him with his possible doubt.

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End." {Rev 21:5-6a NIV}

He brackets all of time in the phrases, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End." Everything in between comes from him. These are words of truth that help us to believe. Remember on the cross our Lord uttered the words "It is finished," {John 19:30}. After the gloom, the darkness, pain, sorrow and anguish of his separation from the Father, he cried out, "It is finished!" The basis of redemption was settled. The sacrifice was ended. The basis was fully laid. Now he says, "It is done!" Redemption is complete. The redeemed are safe home in glory. Everything that God wants done is done! Not one thing is left unfinished.

4. The fourth thing the passage suggests as the purpose of the New Jerusalem is that it will be the home of the redeemed:

"To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son."
{Rev 21:6b-7 NIV}

What marvelous words! This city will be the home of the redeemed, and the only qualification for it is that you be thirsty. Nothing on earth satisfies. Wealth, fame, pleasures and treasures -- none will meet that deep thirst of the soul. That is why the rich, the wealthy, the beautiful people, all are looking for something more. They are not satisfied. But here is the promise to satisfy that thirst. People who want more-who want God-are promised that they shall drink of the water of the spring of life. These are also called "overcomers" who "inherit all this," all that God has created. Peter tells us in his first letter that there is waiting for us "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, kept in heaven for us," {1 Pet 1:4 NIV}. Those who are thus changed by God's grace are to be forever his sons. That includes all female believers as well! You godly women and girls have always had the right to call yourself a son of God because he is "bringing many sons to glory." So we shall all be sons of God in that day.

Now, by contrast, in a reference back to what we have seen of the judgment there is in Verse 8 a description of those who are not admitted:

"But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars-their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."
{Rev 21:8 NIV}

As we have seen all through this book, God does not want that. He is very reluctant that anybody should be judged or condemned, but as the word points out, "they judge themselves." Here there are three attitudes of heart which result in five visible deeds that mark the lost. The three attitudes are the reasons why some will miss this beautiful city.

First, the cowards, i.e. the fearful, those who are afraid to take on the yoke of Christ, who fear to confess Christ, who are unwilling to be unpopular for a little while. They shrug their shoulders and turn away from the offer of life.

Then there are the unbelieving, those who know it is true, but don't want it and refuse the evidence, deliberately turning their backs on truth.

Third, there are the vile. The word means "to become foul." You do not start out that way, but by feeding your mind with filthy things -- foul literature, filthy attitudes and actions, you become foul-minded. If any of these are your attitude, then out of it will flow murders, fornication, adultery, occult practices, and finally, hypocritical living. Jesus warned of that -- those who profess to be Christians but really there is no change in their lives. None who practice these activities will be in the city of God.

In these eight verses we have looked at the purpose of the New Jerusalem. Now John is given another vision

of it and describes it in wonderfully symbolic language as the great city of God:

First, we are informed as to the structure of this city.

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It

had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. {Rev 21:9-14 NIV}

I am sure someone is asking, "Is this literal or is it symbolic?"

I hope, by now, as we have been going through this book, you have come to realize that you do not have to make that choice. God loves to use literal things that remain symbols. The cross behind me is literal {i.e., the cross mounted behind the pulpit at PBC}, but it is also a symbol of the death of Jesus. It is both at the same time. So, all through this book, we find the blending of the literal and symbolic. I believe there will be a great, visible city of incredible brilliance and glory, located somewhere above or within the atmosphere of the earth, which also will picture activities and relationships that are going on within the community of the saints. Those will be characterized by stability, by symmetry, by light, by life and ministry. That is what is described here. The literal is very evident; the symbolic perhaps needs a bit of interpretation.

The high wall of the city speaks of separation and of intimacy. If you want to have an intimate garden party, you meet in the yard behind a wall. That wall shuts out other things and people. It speaks of intimate fellowship and separation from intrusion. The whole of Scripture with one voice speaks of God's desire to have what he calls "a people for my own possession." Everything in the universe is, in a sense, his possession. All animals, all creatures, are his. There are billions of angels and they all belong to him. But the saints are peculiarly God's own possession. That is because he has made them to correspond to himself. He can share with them the deepest things in his life and in his heart. They satisfy him and fulfill him just as a bride satisfies and fulfills her husband.

The gates describe means of access and egress from the city. There is an amazing verse in John 10 where Jesus says, "Whoever enters through me will be saved, and he will go in and out and find pasture," {John 10:9 NIV}. That seems to be a portrayal of the widespread ministry of believers throughout the eternal ages. The new universe will surely be

as big or bigger than it is now -- and it is mind-blowing in its immensity now! Billions of galaxies, far larger than our own galaxy of the Milky Way, fill the heavens as far as the eye can see by means of the greatest telescopes we have, and still we have not reached the end. That means that there will be new planets to develop, new principles to discover, new joys to experience. Every moment of eternity will be an adventure of discovery.

Those gates are named for the tribes of Israel. It is a perpetual reminder that "salvation is of the Jews," {John 4:22 KJV}. Access to the city is through Israel. I believe that pictures the truth that has come to us through the Old Testament prophets and the godly practices of the nation. Many of these brilliant passages that now entrance, but puzzle, us will come to life then as we have never known them before. They will lead us out to new adventures that we have never dreamed of in our wildest imaginations.

The foundations speak of what is underneath which gives stability and permanence. They are named for the 12 apostles. Judas, of course, was replaced in the apostolic band by Matthias as we are told in the first chapter of Acts. These foundations speak of New Testament truth and practice. Things that we only faintly grasp now will be wonderfully understood and experienced then, especially the three things that abide forever: faith, hope, and love! "These three," says Paul, "and the greatest of these is love," {cf, 1 Cor 13:13}. It beggars language to describe this. I find myself stumbling and unable to express fully the beauty that is portrayed here, but I hope that the inner eye of your imagination will make much of it.

Now we are given the measurements of the city.

The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its wall. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and as high as it is long [that is about 1500 miles]. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. {Rev 21:15-17 NIV}

When God measures something it is a sign of his ownership. The number 12, which is everywhere in this account -- 12,000 stadia, 144 cubits (*that is 12 times 12*) wide -- is in Scripture the number of government. So this is a fulfillment of that wonderful word in Isaiah, "the government shall be upon his

shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace," {Isa 9:6}. It is a city of beauty and of symmetry, just as long as it is wide, just as tall as it is long. I do not think you need think of that as a cube; it is more probably a pyramid. It will be a city of perfect proportions. That is what it symbolizes -- perfectly proportioned wholeness!

Everybody wants that. Everyone wants to be a whole person. People say, "I want to be me. I want to fulfill myself. I want to get my act together." Many pick the wrong way to do it. They think that it is all up to them. The one message of the Word of God is that you cannot find your own way. Try to fulfill yourself and you will lose yourself. But if you let God fulfill you, then you will be fully filled -- a wholeness perfectly proportioned, containing nothing awkward, nothing out of balance, but all in harmony. Our friend, Eugene Petersen, whom I have quoted many times in this study, has put it well. He says,

The two symbolic cities of the Apocalypse, Babylon and Jerusalem, show [how a wall creates group consciousness and interrelatedness]. When evil reaches its highest density it forms a whore-city. That city is a concentrate of evil and is destroyed. Likewise, when God-consciousness and the interrelatedness of love reach their highest density, a bride-city is formed.

Not only is the size and shape of the city revealed, but the materials from which it is made are given to us.

The wall was made of jasper [imagine a great diamond shining in the sun], and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. {Rev 21:18-21 NIV}

Let your imagination picture that marvelous city -- gleaming transparent gold, with foundations

sparkling with light in cascading colors, pouring forth from great jewels embedded in the sides -- a kaleidoscope of light and glory!

What are those foundations? As we have already seen, they are the twelve apostles. This then portrays the truth that the apostolic revelation is filled with light. There is a verse in Ephesians 3 where the Apostle Paul speaks of "the manifold wisdom of God that is to be made known by the church to rulers and authorities in heavenly places," {cf, Eph 3:10}. That is describing this same phenomena. The word "manifold" is literally "many-colored," -- the many-colored wisdom of God -- fresh wisdom flashing from old truth from the apostles.

The gates are made of single pearls. You have heard many jokes about St. Peter and the pearly gates, which we usually conceive of as a single great pair of gates. But there are twelve gates, each one is a gigantic pearl, and St. Peter is nowhere to be seen at any of them! God must have some huge oysters somewhere in this new universe for each gate is but a single pearl!

Pearls speak of beauty out of pain. Beauty comes from pain in an oyster. I have a message I preached years ago on the parable of the Pearl of Great Price. I called it *The Case of the Irritated Oyster*, because a pearl is formed when a tiny grain of sand gets inside an oyster's shell and the oyster becomes very uncomfortable. It feels like crackers in bed. To relieve its pain it covers the irritant with a soft lustrous nacre that hardens into a beautiful, glowing pearl. It describes beautifully how the redeemed come from the pain of Jesus. He was the husbandman who came looking for a pearl of great price. He found one, a beautiful pearl which came out of the pain that he suffered as he went through the terrible anguish of the cross. Out of that pain came the church of Jesus Christ, the pearl of great price. He sold all that he had to buy it. This means that the redeemed will never forget for all eternity the pain and shame of the cross of Christ. They will sing forever,

*In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time.
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.*

The transcendent light of this city is described next.

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. {Rev 21:22-27 NIV}

All through Revelation we have seen a temple in heaven described. That temple remains throughout the millennium, as the original of which the earthly temple is a copy. But in the new heavens and earth there is no temple. Why? Because the true temple, of which the one in the old heavens is a picture, is the True Man, Jesus himself. God in man that is the temple! Thus Paul, in First Corinthians, says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you?" {1 Cor 6:19a NIV}. If God dwells in you, you are a part of this heavenly temple. You share the honor of being the home of God, the dwelling place of God. And from that comes radiant light. People can see all things by that truth. So glorious is it that there is no need for the sun or the moon. It does not say they are not there; it simply says there is no need for them in this city of God. There will never be night there because it is lit continually by the glory which is God in man. The gates will never be shut because there is no night there and therefore no need for protection. Cities close their gates at night because they are in danger. But there is nothing to destroy in this new world to come. The kings of the earth will bring their glory in, not to compete with the glory of God, but to have it revealed by the light of God. Nothing impure will enter because only the redeemed are admitted.

Finally, the life of this city is described in the opening words of chapter 22:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month.

And the leaves of the tree are for the health [not healing, as translated in the NIV] of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. {Rev 22:1-5 NIV}

What a glorious picture of abounding fertility, of life on every side -- a river of life, a tree of life. Both of these are found in the Old Testament. Psalm 46 says, "There is a river that makes glad the city of God," {cf, Psa 46:4a}. Ezekiel describes a river flowing out from the throne of God. It is a wonderful river to swim in, he said. The tree of life is found in the Garden of Eden. It is right there, along with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But here it is back again.

The river symbolizes the Holy Spirit. Jesus said on one occasion of those who believe in him, "out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water," {John 7:38 KJV}. John comments, "This he said of the Spirit, which those who believe on him should receive," {cf, John 7:39 KJV}. The tree is a symbol of Jesus himself. He is the way, the truth and the life, the tree of life. When we obey the Word of God we are eating and feeding on Jesus and drawing life from that nourishment. That is what this signifies. It brings spiritual health. We flourish when we follow his word and obey and live by it.

No wonder that from this magnificent scene of life there flow three wonderful ministries:

First, empowered service. His servants will serve him. There is nothing they could ask for more than that; there is no greater pleasure or joy than the service of God. And they will be in intimate fellowship -- they will see his face, and bear his name, just as a bride bears her husband's name and sees his face.

And they will have enlightened authority. They shall reign forever and ever. Do you think heaven is going to be boring? No, boredom is a sign of selfishness. When you are bored, it is because you are selfish. You want someone to do something for you; you want some excitement to minister to you. But all selfishness will be ended then, and therefore

there will be no boredom in heaven. There is continual excitement, discovery, anticipation -- and constant gratitude and praise.

The rest of the book is simply an epilogue. As the book began with a prologue, so it ends with an epilogue. It consists mostly of assurances.

Many people neglect the book of Revelation. They distrust it and do not understand it. They need reassurance that it comes from God and speaks the truth. So the epilogue is made up of assurances, the first one from "the God of the spirits of the prophets."

The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."
{Rev 22:6 NIV}

There is a guarantee right from God himself that these words are to be believed. They are trustworthy and true. Then an assurance from Jesus himself.

"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."
{Rev 22:7 NIV}

Read it, study it, keep it, he says. You will be blessed and strengthened by it, and made ready to meet him when he comes. Then there follows a word from John:

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!" {Rev 22:8-9 NIV}

We have an account like this in Chapter 19 where the same thing is recorded. Personally I do not believe that John made the same mistake twice. I think here he is referring back to what he did in Chapter 19. He is reminding us how he reacted when he heard all these things. He says, in effect, "When I had heard them and seen them I was so confused, so uncertain, and so overwhelmed that I fell down to worship at the angel's feet." He is recounting his most embarrassing moment, and reminding us that it was quite the wrong reaction. Let it lead you, rather, to worship God. When you read this book, open your heart and praise the God

of glory who gives us such a fantastic future as that described here.

Then there is another word from the angel:

Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."
{Rev 22:10-11 NIV}

That is a reminder again that each day we are working out one of two separate destinies. Either we are on the right track, following the Lord, walking with him, doing right, or we have already made a choice for wrong and our lives are falling apart. If that is the course you are determined on, then evil is what will follow. There is no other escape than the way of faith in Christ. You will have to continue the way you are going.

Then a reassuring word comes from Jesus again,

"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."
{Rev 22:12-13 NIV}

That is a wonderful renewal of his promise that when he comes, all this shall become true.

The next word is a reminder of the two destinies once again,

"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs [that is an ancient word for those who practice homosexuality], those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood [that is, those who pretend to be something they are not]."
{Rev 22:14-15 NIV}

That is a most solemn warning, a reminder that what we do and believe from day to day is leading us in one direction or the other.

Then yet another word from Jesus:

I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David [he is the root from which David came, and he is also David's son], and the bright Morning Star [the one who promises to

come for his own before the Son of Righteousness arises}.” {Rev 22:16 NIV}

Notice the many times through this closing section we have the promise that Jesus is coming soon. Many people read that and say, “How can that be? This was said centuries ago.” Some even say, “John and the other apostles were wrong. They said he was coming soon, but 2,000 years have gone by and he still hasn’t come. It shows how wrong this book is.” But if you read this book remembering that it is a book that links time and eternity together, you will understand that everything here, either the destiny of the lost or the destiny of the righteous, takes place the minute you die. It is never any further away than your own personal death. That could be very soon, couldn’t it? It may yet be some time before it breaks into time, but it will not be long before each of us leaves time and enters eternity.

The book then closes with an invitation and another brief warning:

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come! And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. {Rev 22:17 NIV}

That is the invitation. It comes from the Spirit of God himself, and from the redeemed of God (*the Bride*), and from each individual Christian. All voices join to exhort the reader: “Come!” Take the free gift of life. It is waiting for all who come to Christ.

Then the warning:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. {Rev 22:18-19 NIV}

In other words, do not change a thing! This is the truth of God. Do not change it -- do not subtract from it or add to it. It is what God says. As a symbolic book, it requires interpretation, but be careful. Do not take away its meaning by emphasizing the symbolic at the expense of the literal. Do not destroy its intent by accepting only the literal without understanding what it symbolizes. Believe it, because the final word from Jesus is:

He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” {Rev 22:20a NIV}

So let all God’s people say:

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. {Rev 22:20b NIV}

And as we close the book, I join John the Apostle in saying to you:

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen. {Rev 22:21 NIV}

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