

GOD WITH US

Part 12: THE APOCALYPSE

Message 4 – Revelation 19-22

God With Us

Introduction

This book of “Revelation” is all about the “unveiling of Jesus Christ” (1:1). For 18 chapters we are taken on a journey through a series of events preparing for His ultimate unveiling. God purifies the Earth of all rebellion against His will. Finally, in one act of revelation and judgment, the Son of God descends from heaven to establish His righteous rule upon the Earth. In one powerful appearing He destroys the remnants of Satan’s kingdom in the battle of Armageddon, after which He establishes His righteous administration upon the Earth for a period of 1,000 years, prior to the onset of the eternal kingdom. Jesus repeatedly said that He would come a second time. Here is the fulfillment of His promise.

The Second Coming of Christ

As with so many scenes in Revelation, this climactic one opens with singing. A four-fold “hallelujah” sounds from the heavenly choir in response to the righteous judgment of God upon Babylon the Great (chs.17,18), and in anticipation of the appearance of the Lamb of God on the stage of human history (chs.19,20). The city of man, with all of its godless pomp and wanton pleasure, has been abolished. Now, the city of God will be established in righteousness and truth, with Jesus Christ personally at the helm of the new kingdom on Earth. Recall the Lord’s Prayer: “*The kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven.*” We have seen this prayer only partially fulfilled in the centuries following the first coming of Christ. Now we see the ultimate fulfillment of that prayer as the kingdom of heaven literally becomes the kingdom on Earth.

“After these things I heard, as it were, a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her.’ And a second time they said, ‘Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up forever and ever.’ And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, ‘Amen. Hallelujah!’ And a voice came from the

throne, saying, 'Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.' And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.' And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And he said to me, 'Write, Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are true words of God.' And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, 'Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'" (19:1-10).

The entire Bible is one grand movement toward the wedding day of Christ. The consummation will be the second coming of Christ and the end of the age, when the people of God (His bride) are united with the Son of God forever. The period of betrothal and anticipation will have ended; the time of eternal union will have arrived, and Christ will take His Bride with Him into their eternal home.

The garments of the bride of Christ (fine linen, bright and clean) stand in marked contrast to those of the harlot (purple and scarlet). The latter signify opulence and extravagance, while the former signify purity and holiness. The garments of the bride of Christ are woven from *the righteous acts* of the saints. The blood of Christ cleanses us from sin, while our righteous acts, performed in response to His forgiving love, adorn us for the wedding day. It is through righteous deeds that the doctrine of God is "adorned" in every respect (Titus 2:10f). These deeds do not earn salvation; rather, they show salvation's beauty in the life of the recipient. They are deeds of gratitude for His mercy.

Mercy accepted leads to life eternal with the Lamb. Mercy rejected leads to a final encounter with the wrath of the Lamb and an eternal separation from God. Jesus Christ now turns from His beautiful bride to tread the wine press of the wrath of God (19:15f; cf.14:20) at the battle of Armageddon. This occurs at the second coming of Christ.

"And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war. And His eyes are a flame of fire, and upon His head are many diadems; and He has a name written upon Him which no one knows except Himself. And He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies

which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, 'KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.' And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, 'Come, assemble for the great supper of God; in order that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.' And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse, and against His army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh" (19:11-21).

The visible return of Christ is one of the most prominent teachings of the New Testament. Almost every book of the New Testament anticipates this event. It differs so greatly from His first coming. Then He was gentle, humble, loving, sacrificing Himself for us. He veiled His glory, clothed Himself in frail humanity and went to a cross for our sins. Here, in stark contrast, He comes in great power and majesty judging and waging war. His eyes are a flame of fire. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood – imagery drawn from Isaiah 63 where God treads the wine press of judgment. This is what we saw back at the end of Revelation 14, when the Earth was harvested and the vintage was thrown into the wine press of the wrath of God. This is an encounter with divine judgment for having rejected the Lamb of God, for having said “No” to His costly sacrifice of love.

The beast and the false prophet are seized at the end of the battle of Armageddon and thrown into the lake of fire. But what of the 3rd member of the unholy tri-unity, the devil himself? God has a different plan for Satan. His final judgment will come, but at a different time.

The Millennial Reign of Christ on Earth

“And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the

dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years” (20:1-6).

Satan is seized and thrown into the abyss for 1,000 years. During that time period he is no longer free to work his deceptive schemes on the Earth. He cannot deceive individuals or nations. He cannot tempt or ensnare. He cannot oppose the work of God. He cannot hold people captive. It is a period of time called “The Millennium” (which means “1,000”), during which Jesus Christ rules on Earth personally and visibly, with no opposition from Satanic activity.

This is the only passage in the Bible where we learn of this Millennial reign of Christ. N.T. interpreters differ over the meaning of the Millennium. Essentially, there are three major views.

Amillennialism: Some understand the Millennium to be the present age during which the reign of Christ is spiritual. His millennial rule is in heaven. On this view, Satan is bound right now, and the rule of Christ is effective in the hearts of believers as they enter into relationship with Christ. This view has been called “Amillennialism,” meaning “no (literal) millennium.”

Postmillennialism: Others understand the Millennium to be the triumphal progress of the gospel through the Church in the present age. “Postmillennialism” argues that the second coming of Christ will take place *after (post)* the Millennium, not before it. Thus, Revelation 20 is a *retrospective look back* at the entire period between the first and second coming of Christ, during which the devil has been bound and the Church has, through the gospel, progressively brought His rule to every aspect of life on Earth.

Premillennialism: On this view (which I hold), Christ returns *prior to* the 1,000-year period, which is a literal reign of Christ on the Earth following His second coming. Thus, Revelation 20 is sequential, following the second coming (ch.19) and preceding the eternal state (chs.21,22). Premillennialists hold that the followers of Christ who have previously been taken out of the Earth, either through rapture or through death, return with Christ at His 2nd coming, to rule with Him in this Millennial kingdom. During this 1,000-year reign on Earth, Satan is bound while Christ fulfills the many Old Testament regarding Israel, prophecies that speak of a period of perfect peace and harmony among the created order. The final rebellion and destruction of Satan follows the 1,000-year period.

The Release and Destruction of Satan

This brings us to the last sequence of events before eternity. At the end of the 1,000 years, Satan is released from his prison. He goes out and, true to form, He makes one last attempt to deceive the nations of the Earth; to rally them to rebel against God. He is able to muster a fairly large final rebellion, which says something about the heart of man. Even after living in idyllic conditions for 1,000 years, under the personal reign of Christ, the sinful heart of man is capable of rising up in rebellion against God. A huge army surrounds *the camp of the saints and the beloved city*, apparently the center of Jesus' Millennial rule. Fire descends from heaven as God quickly destroys this final rebel army that has surrounded His people. He throws Satan into the lake of fire where the other two members of the unholy tri-unity have been for the entire 1,000-year period. The lake of fire is the final resting place of Satan.

“And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (20:7-10).

The Final Judgment

The only thing left before eternity is the final judgment; the separation of the righteous from the unrighteous. God takes His seat on a great

white throne. All of humanity, living or dead, comes before Him to be judged. The book of life is opened. Ancient cities kept registries of their citizens. If your name was on the city books, you were entitled to certain rights and privileges, and guaranteed certain protections. If your name was not on the registry, you were an outsider. The eternal city of God, which will be the focus of the final two chapters of Revelation, has a registry that God Himself holds. If your name is found in the book of life, you walk through the door into the eternal city. If your name is not found in the book of life, you go into a state of eternal separation from God.

“And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (20:11-15).

The New Heavens and New Earth

Chapters 6 – 20 of Revelation are like being on a long stretch of difficult highway with no rest stops. Judgments flow incessantly from the throne room of heaven – seals, trumpets, and bowls – culminating in the return of Christ, the battle of Armageddon, the final rebellion of Satan, the battle of God and Magog, the great white throne judgment, and, ultimately, the eternal lake of fire. Simply reading this section of Scripture through is a sobering experience. We can now understand what Jeremiah the prophet was feeling when, after delivering message after message of doom to ancient Israel, he cried out to God and spoke of being “filled with indignation” and a seemingly incurable pain.

“Thy words were found and I ate them, and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Thy name, O LORD God of hosts. I did not sit in the circle of merrymakers, nor did I exult. Because of Thy hand upon me I sat alone, for Thou didst fill me with indignation. Why has my pain been perpetual and my wound incurable, refusing to be healed” (Jeremiah 15:16-18)?

We have been eating and digesting these words of judgment from Revelation. There is no merriment in this; no exultation when considering the wrath of God. The weight of God's holiness and justice can feel like an incurable wound, a festering sore to those who ponder it in a prolonged and honest manner. But we must confront the painful reality of God's purifying judgments that flow from His holiness (the throne-room vision of ch.4). That is why God gives us a book like Revelation and why He tells us not to seal up the words of the prophecy (22:10). The Holy Spirit made Revelation long and difficult to impress upon us the weight and severity of the day of God's final judgment. By the time you finish reading through these chapters of you feel like running back to the mercy of God! And that is precisely the point of all prophetic warnings: to point us to the mercy, the grace, the love of God. If you are tired of judgment by Revelation 20, that is proper. God wants you to be tired of it. He wants you to be so tired of it that you take the steps necessary to find refuge in the cross of Christ. Remember, the "Lamb" is mentioned some 23 times in this book. There is the constant reminder of mercy, flowing from the Lamb Who was slain, throughout the long and difficult stretch of judgments. *"Mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13).*

Finally, after the storm, we arrive at the never-ending rest stop. Like an oasis in a desert, we come to Revelation 21 and 22. What a breath of fresh air these final chapters are. No more judgments, no more wrath. It is all finished. Everything is new. Eternity breaks in here, never to be disrupted by evil again. This is the way that everything IS going to end. This is the final reward for those who have chosen to hear, heed and obey God's words. Paradise was lost in Genesis; it has been fought for up until Revelation 20; it is finally recaptured and restored in Revelation 21 and 22.

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.' And He who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' And He said, 'Write, for these words are faithful and true.' And He said to me, 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the

one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (21:1-8).

Here we detect the reality of *God’s overarching desire to be WITH US.* Look closely at verse 3. *“Among them, among them, among them.”* Paradise is not just a place; it is God coming to be WITH US once again. No more separation, no more distance, no more mediation, no more veils. He will dwell among us, forever. And that is really the point of these final two chapters: to tell us about the restoration of a paradise *in which God and man dwell together.*

The Bride, the Wife of the Lamb!

One of the seven angels who had earlier poured out a bowl of wrath on the earth, now takes John to see *“the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”* John sees the holy city, Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. In the following section there will be a subtle overlap between the “city” of heaven and the inhabitants of that city. At first the focus seems to be on the inhabitants (vv.9-14), and then the focus shifts to the dimensions and design of the city where these privileged people dwell (vv.15-27). While the language, strictly taken, seems to imply that the city itself is the wife of the Lamb, it makes more sense to say that the inhabitants of the city are the Lamb’s wife, while the city is their eternal home.

The People

“And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying, ‘Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are those of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (21:9-14).

The name of the city, Jerusalem, shows the continuity of God’s work in both the Old and New Testament eras. The 12 gates representing the

twelve tribes of Israel and 12 foundation stones named after the twelve apostles of the Lamb depict all believers from the periods both before and after Christ. These are the inhabitants of the eternal city – the bride of Christ, the people who have identified with Him. Next, John is drawn to a description of the heavenly city itself, the eternal home of the Lamb and His people.

The Place

“The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements. The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (21:15-27).

The eternal city is not just an idea; it has shape, substance and content. I lean toward a literal understanding of what John was seeing. This city is like a massive cube, 1,500 miles in length, width and height. Some suggest that it has multiple layers (rather than simply 1,500 miles of air space above a single layer). Picture a building that has 1,500 stories, with each story being bigger than the country of India. Imagine one mile of atmosphere between each story. This might be how vast, how huge, how multi-layered and multi-dimensional the heavenly city is.

The materials of the city are splendid, pointing to its glory. It is like one gigantic jewel, shimmering in the light. Most importantly, the Lord God

and the Lamb are at the center of the city. They are “its temple” and “its lamp.” All glory and honor will be focused on God and the Lamb; all will walk in fellowship with Him.

Back to the Garden

It is no coincidence that the final chapter of the Bible opens with a description not just of a city, but of a garden that is woven into the center of the city. The story of the Bible opened with a garden, where things went terribly wrong. How fitting that it ends with a garden where things are made right again.

“Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever” (22:1-5).

The imagery of the water flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb is clear: God and the Lamb are the source of the water of life. Their very presence feeds the inhabitants of the eternal city. Further, we see the Tree of Life *on either side of the river*. Recall the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden – a tree that had the power to sustain life forever. That is why, after the fall, God prevented Adam and Eve from having access to the Tree of Life – so that they would not live in their fallen condition forever. Now, the Tree of Life appears again in the midst of the city, complete with 12 different kinds of fruits! Access is richly provided for our eternal joy. We are with God again, back “in the Garden.” We can “see His face.” The story is complete; the mission is accomplished. God has brought His people back to Himself.

The Postscript

“And he said to me, “These words are faithful and true”; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place. ‘And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book’” (22:6,7).

We are reminded again that the book of Revelation is a prophetic word

from God, given to His servants to read. We are also reminded of the opening blessing of the book: *“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near”* (Revelation 1:3).

“I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he said to me, ‘Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God’” (22:8-9).

The overall prophetic experience overwhelmed John. He fell down to worship at the feet of the angel, but no good angel will accept the worship of humans. Only God is worthy of our worship.

“And he said to me, ‘Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy’” (22:10-11).

The seals of this most holy book had been opened by Jesus Himself. The final admonition is to NOT seal the book up again; rather, allow it to remain open for humanity to read. The unusual words of 22:11 seem to be aimed at people who are alive on earth just prior to Jesus’ return. It would appear that the lines are fixed, that the time for repentance (change) has passed. Human beings will come face to face with Jesus Christ in the condition they have chosen for themselves.

Finally, Jesus Himself speaks to conclude the book.

“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star” (22:12-16).

Who is the Alpha and the Omega in Revelation 1:8? It was the Lord, God Almighty. Who is the Alpha and the Omega in Revelation 22:13? It is Jesus, the One Who is to come. Those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb have eternal access to the Tree of Life.

Those who have not been cleansed by His blood are permanently left outside of the eternal city.

Then, a final invitation to prepare for His coming.

“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 wishes take the water of life without cost” (22:17).

Just as Revelation is the only book that promises a blessing on those who read it, so it is the only book that promises a curse on those who either add to or take away from it.

“I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming quickly.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen” (22:18-20).

People “add to” the prophecies of Revelation by suggesting new or additional revelation from God, beyond the words of this book. With the completion of Revelation, the New Testament collection of inspired writings (words from God) was closed. People “take away” from the prophecies of Revelation by minimizing or denying their significance; suggesting that these words are fanciful, not factual; that they are mythical, not true. The bottom line is that we need to hold the book of Revelation in the highest regard as ‘holy Scripture,’ along with the other 26 books of the New Testament and 39 books of the Old Testament. Revelation is, thus, the ‘last word’ from God to humanity, before the return of Jesus Christ. This is how the story ends. Read it often and believe it completely.