

## BOOK OF REVELATION

### Lesson 52 - Chapter 22 Continued (End of Book)

Today we shall complete our study of the Book of Revelation. From the beginning my purpose was not to make this a sensational and dramatic survey about the End Times nor to create new doctrines or traditions. Rather it was to study the Book of Revelation for what it is: God's Word. Holy Scripture. And to take it in the plainest sense possible, while understanding that much symbolism combined with deep mystery is incorporated. Admittedly, at times it has been challenging to sort out which is which, and so in the end you will each need to decide which side the evidence seems to fall heaviest.

Especially starting with chapter 22 verse 6 a sense of urgency is introduced into this book's call to holiness. It is made by repeating the same essential message over and over; and that urgency revolves around the timing and certainty of Yeshua making His long awaited return. Verse 6 speaks of it in terms of "the things that must happen soon". Verse 7 says, "Look I am coming very soon". Verse 10 says that the fulfillment of Revelation's prophecies is near. Verse 12 says: "Pay attention, says Yeshua, I am coming soon". Verse 20 says, "Yes, I am coming soon".

Why this repetitious warning of imminence to end this book? Because at the moment of Christ's return, Revelation tells us that the spiritual condition and therefore the eternal future of each and every human being that is living, or has ever lived, will be forever frozen. This means that when the Trumpet sounds and Christ descends back to earth (however it is that it happens), it does not signal a final opportunity to make a decision or to rethink a wrong one; rather it means the time for decision has come and gone. Permanently. This is the context in which we must understand the final few precious words of the Bible.

Open your Bibles to Revelation chapter 22.

#### RE-READ REVELATION CHAPTER 22:6 - end

Verse 7, in addition to building up the theme of urgency, also reminds us of something that we were told at the very beginning of John's Apocalypse.

**<sup>CJB</sup> Revelation 1:3 <sup>3</sup> *Blessed are the reader and hearers of the words of this prophecy, provided they obey the things written in it! For the time is near!***

**So verse 7 says: <sup>7</sup> *"Look! I am coming very soon. Blessed is the person who obeys the words of the prophecy written in this book!"***

Thus the beginning and the ending of Revelation are tied together in a neat bundle with those two verses behaving as book ends. Let's not bypass the definition of who gets the blessing for

reading John's book because often in Christian circles the message is that a very good incentive for reading Revelation (as difficult a read as it is) is because all who do will receive a blessing from God. However the all-important qualifier is left out. And the qualifier is that in order to receive that divine blessing reading the words or listening to them simply isn't enough; one must **obey** them. We must embrace this book as a treasure and as a command. God does something very unusual in it; He gifts us with a glimpse of not only the historical future, but also of the eternal future after the end of history. He sets out requirements for us to participate in the Millennial Kingdom and after that the new earth and new Universe; but also the things that disqualify us. Yet, some of those disqualifiers are no longer politically or socially popular to utter, and so societies and even churches have often sought to find ways to dilute them or to dismiss them altogether as primitive, irrelevant, or even hateful. We'll talk about that a little more, shortly.

I remind you that by this point in chapter 22 the series of visions has ended and we're reading about things that John received either audibly or by inspiration. So John says that after seeing and hearing, he was so overcome with awe that he fell down at the feet of the angel who delivered at least some of the messages and worshipped him. The angel of course immediately rebuked him reminding John that he, too, was no more than a fellow servant. God deserves all the glory, and God is the only one to be worshipped. It is noteworthy that the angel says that among the fellow servants are the prophets and the people who obey the words of this book. He is speaking of the Old Testament prophets from whom John drew so much of his wording and the structure of his book; those who were shown or told much of what John was shown only they received a similar message centuries earlier. And the people who obey the words are, too, only servants of God. So when it comes to worship there is a universal two class system in place: the One to be worshipped...God.... versus everybody and everything else as the worshippers.

In verse 10 John is instructed to do something that has a familiar ring to it. However, the instruction essentially commands the opposite of what an earlier prophet was told to do.

**<sup>CJB</sup> Daniel 12:4 *"But you, Dani'el, keep these words secret, and seal up the book until the time of the end. Many will rush here and there as knowledge increases."***

So while Daniel was told to keep the visions of the future that were given to him a secret, John was told to publish those he received. Why could John reveal what Daniel had to conceal? The 2nd half of Daniel 12:4 tells us what the criteria is for revealing what at first God wanted held back. It was that knowledge would increase. Knowledge of what? Knowledge by whom? We've discussed on numerous occasions that not only Revelation but also the words of the Old Testament Prophets in past times were often not understood or they were outright misunderstood until with the passage of time, enough history unfolded so that the circumstances surrounding the prophesied events became imaginable or even apparent.

John had substantially more knowledge and understanding than Daniel because John lived 7 centuries after Daniel. For instance: while for Daniel salvation was little more than the Jewish people being rescued from their Babylonian captivity and returning, in freedom, to their homeland, that was but a shadow of what was coming. John came to understand salvation on

an entirely different level. No longer was salvation only a liberation from an earthly oppressor; it had become a spiritual reality of far more impact because it crosses all cultural boundaries and transcends all eras. Even the One who performed the saving act was known to John. Daniel was given a brief insight into several distant, even End Times, events. But he could make little sense of them because they were utterly bizarre to his mind. In fact they confused and upset him so terribly that we read:

**<sup>CJB</sup> Daniel 8:27** *I, Dani'el, grew weak and was ill for some days. Then I got up and took care of the king's affairs; but I was appalled at the vision and still couldn't understand it.*

John did understand some of his visions (many were a replay of Daniel's) but not all. He received a better understanding of the sequence of future events and to an extent when they would occur. John had the benefit of Daniel's, Ezekiel's, Isaiah's, and all the other Old Testament Prophets prophecies. Still; most of the visions were to take place so far from John's time, as we are now privileged to know, that there was no way that he could possibly understand the features, shapes, objects, and human institutions that he was being shown. But rather than being confused to the point of illness as with Daniel, John was awed to the point of wrongly worshipping the messenger of the oracles.

Verse 11 is a modern Theologian's nightmare. It says something about God that many do not want to admit or entertain. It is that our loving and longsuffering Lord can also be severe. Essentially the words seem to say: however you are, you are destined to remain that way. Not a lot of hope in that, is there? Let's tackle this and see if we can perhaps understand the point.

First, I see this as an offshoot of the story of the divine hardening of Pharaoh's heart in Exodus. Christians are generally comfortable with the idea that God knows all things about us, including the hidden. Therefore He knows in advance what we'll choose or do in any given situation. And yet Christians are at times troubled by the knowledge that because of God's omniscience He will at times set His hand against someone such that they seem to lose the ability to make a different choice than they've already made. That is, God blocks their ability to reconsider and repent. We seem to read something quite similar in the words of 22:11.

However, second, I think this statement coincides with the series of ominous warnings that Yeshua is coming quickly and soon. Many scholars think that (at least in some instances) a better sense of the word that describes Christ's return is to take quickly as meaning suddenly. That is, it is less an issue of where along a timeline the return finally occurs than it is that when it finally happens it will be instantaneous..... suddenly. I suspect that both ideas come into play in this final chapter of Revelation; that Messiah's return is imminent and it will occur instantly when that time comes. Therefore, as these two troubling statements say, and as we discussed earlier, it is important that a person not delay in making their decision for Christ before He returns because at the moment of it that person's condition and future are set in stone before he or she has a chance to change their mind.

There is yet another side, a third side, to these startling pronouncements; they are a kind of rewording of something Daniel said.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Daniel 12:10** *Many will purify, cleanse and refine themselves; but the wicked will keep on acting wickedly, and none of the wicked will understand. But those with discernment will understand.*

This aspect states what the wicked do, versus what the righteous do. And since the wicked will go on behaving wickedly they will not understand either the goodness of the Lord or the meaning of the events of the End Times as they begin to happen. But the righteous will further purify, cleanse, and refine themselves and as a result receive discernment such that they do understand the goodness of the Lord and also the meaning of the events of the End Times as they unfold.

In the end, these 3 aspects of the meaning of those words of verse 11 work together to make a simple point about the nature of humanity: it is that over time, and eventually, character tends to become fixed and unchangeable and consequently determines each person's destiny. This is more a proverb than a law because while not true 100% of the time, it is true far more than it is not. So verse 11 is a warning to non-Believers, and an exhortation to Believers.

Verse 12 is not the Theologian's nightmare as is verse 11, but it is troubling for nearly all of Evangelical Christianity and for several other branches of the Church. It cannot be more plainly said that what we do during our lives on earth will have a serious impact on our eternal lives. Yeshua says that He is coming soon, and along with Him will come the various rewards that will be meted out based entirely upon the works each person has done. Certainly this is not speaking about a works based salvation. But it is speaking about a works based rewards system for the saved. Now is as good a time as any to once again recite those critical words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in this regard.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Matthew 5:17-19** <sup>17</sup> *"Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete.* <sup>18</sup> *Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah-not until everything that must happen has happened.* <sup>19</sup> *So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Notice who is speaking in Revelation 22:12: He directly identifies Himself as Yeshua. Notice who is speaking in Matthew 5:17 - 19: once again it is Yeshua. So it should come as no surprise that we see this principle that our obedience and works based on God's Laws during our lives will be the determining factor for our place and our reward in the Kingdom of Heaven, even though our basic membership in the Kingdom is determined solely on our sincere trust in Christ as Lord and Savior.

Yeshua then goes on to say something startling if not confusing: "I am the A and the Z, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." These are terms that up to now in the Bible have been reserved for that aspect of God that we label as The Father. So how can we have Yeshua also claiming them? The tendency in Christianity has been to create a divisive polarity in which we ascribe all authority and power to Christ and relegate The Father to obscurity; or

the other way around. I find neither approach to accurately reflect the Scriptures in their totality even though we might be able to isolate sections of the Bible, laying aside their larger context, as an attempt to prove that such a polarity exists. I confess that I am at a loss for words to properly express what the meaning of this statement in verse 13 is communicating except to say that in some sense I think we ought to have expected it. I say this because somehow as Believers we are to try to comprehend the biblical dynamic that in the beginning the Word was with God and the Word was God .... so utterly inseparable was God's unity. And yet at some point, some kind of reorientation occurred in which the "Word" aspect of God (or perhaps only some portion of the Word aspect of God) came to earth, assumed flesh, was born of a woman, lived a normal life, and was hung on a cross dying a gruesome death. Then He was resurrected by the Father. The purpose of His advent and His actions was to affect the atonement necessary for God to grant a full pardon to all those who trusted in what He had done.

All throughout Revelation we clearly are witness to some sort of division of authority and labor in which God and the Lamb are spoken of distinctively, separately, and even set in a hierarchy with God the Father as the ultimate and God the Son (the Lamb) as the subservient. Now, upon the Re-Creation that begets a new earth and a new Universe, that reorientation seems to have ended and God has become reunified in the most complete way such that the division of authority, labor and hierarchy seems to have dissolved back into exactly as it was in the beginning. I am painfully aware of the inadequacy of my words; but I have no other explanation to offer. Although I also am comforted that not too long from now, it won't matter because all will become clear as our eternity with this same majestic and mysterious God begins.

In the same way that there is controversy within Christianity over Christ handing out rewards based on deeds and works, so verse 14 creates another in explaining that "How blessed are those who wash their robes...." That is, commentators and Theologians debate over whether there was a manuscript error regarding this phrase because to many of them this statement smacks of a Believer essentially saving him or herself by washing their own robe. John is, in my opinion, continuing tying up the bundle so to speak by repeating some of the most salient points made earlier and connecting them to others. The matter of the washing of robes as a metaphor for holiness was spoken about much earlier in Revelation in chapter 7.

**CJB Revelation 7:13-14 <sup>13</sup> One of the elders asked me, "These people dressed in white robes- who are they, and where are they from?" <sup>14</sup> "Sir," I answered, "you know." Then he told me, "These are the people who have come out of the Great Persecution. They have washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb.**

The Bible is positively filled with metaphors and expressions regularly used in that age. And in that age garments being made white was a common metaphor for ritual purity and for holiness. In fact, this statement in Revelation 7 is an intentional irony: how can a robe be made white by being soaked in Christ's blood? Wouldn't it come out red? So we have to step back and understand that this was simply a common manner of speaking and that the idea is that those who are holy and righteous have the right to enter the gates of the New Jerusalem and eat from the Tree of Life..... which itself is symbolic of, and it bestows, eternal life.

Beginning with verse 15 another list is introduced; a list of the outsiders. This list is similar in purpose as one presented in chapter 21 verse 8. Although on the surface this is a list of those excluded from the city of New Jerusalem, it is meant to communicate those who are excluded from the new earth entirely; otherwise it is nonsensical since the new earth is an eternally created place of purest holiness with sin and evil having been completely eradicated. The first excluded category is, according to the CJB, homosexuals. In fact in Greek the word is **kuon** and it means dogs. I cannot say with absolute certainty that in this context dogs means homosexuals.

In biblical Jewish society and even in ancient Hebrew times, dogs were held in contempt as being filthy and nearly without worth. They were not pets and in Jewish ritual they were unclean. Dogs were viewed as shameless, without any redeeming virtues. Thus as you can imagine, the term dog was used as a nasty epithet hurled toward an enemy or a despised person for any number of reasons. It indeed was the customary term used throughout the Bible for a male prostitute. Thus when speaking of dogs figuratively, it was in most cases (though admittedly not all) speaking of gay men, which is the likely case here given the context as a very specific behavioral lifestyle that was excluded from eternal life with God.

The next specific excluded behavior was sorcerers who, invariably, used magical concoctions (drugs) as part and parcel of their sorcery. And after that are what the CJB calls the sexually immoral. The KJV says it is the whoremonger, and the NAS says it means the unchaste. Still other versions say fornicators. We covered this in an earlier lesson, but briefly the Greek word these different translations are trying to interpret is  **pornos**. And the Greek lexicons agree that in biblical usage this word specifically means male prostitutes who sell their services to other males. So since this indeed is referring to male homosexuals, then one has to wonder if the term dogs is doing the same. The bottom line is this: whether it is the term dogs or it is this Greek term  **pornos**, one or the other (perhaps both) certainly means to communicate homosexual lifestyles.

The next excluded category is murderers. This is a good time to remind you that each of these behavioral categories does NOT mean that if you have at some time in your life committed one or the other of these behaviors that you will not inherit eternal life. Rather we are to understand these as behaviors that have grown to the level of chosen identities and lifestyles. So, yes, a person who has murdered can be redeemed and have eternal life. But a person who murders for the sheer pleasure of it and bases their lifestyle upon it, is lost forever.

After murder comes idol worshippers, essentially meaning people who worship gods other than the God of the Bible. This can include atheists who essentially worship themselves as supreme beings therefore putting themselves in the place of God. And then finally, deceivers.

Verse 16 says that it was Yeshua who sent a messenger (an angel) to enact these visions and inspirations in John, which are meant for the Messianic communities; or in more typical modern language, for the Churches. Let's go back for a moment to the opening words of Revelation:

**<sup>CJB</sup> Revelation 1:1 *This is the revelation which God gave to Yeshua the Messiah, so that he could show his servants what must happen very soon. He communicated it by***

***sending his angel to his servant Yochanan.....***

So we must understand that this message was contrived within the being of God the Father, who sent God the Son as His agent to deliver it, who then chose to deliver God's message by means of an angel. And we must also understand that Yeshua is only repeating in Rev. 22:15 what was said back in Rev. 1:1.

When He says that He is the Root and the Offspring of David He means this: as the Root of David, Yeshua is identifying Himself with Israel. And as the Offspring of David He is identifying Himself with the Messianic lineage promised in the Prophets. And while He doesn't directly quote any particular Old Testament passage, He clearly draws upon Moses and Isaiah.

**CJB Numbers 24:17** *"I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not soon- a star will step forth from Ya'akov, a scepter will arise from Isra'el, to crush the corners of Mo'av and destroy all descendants of Shet.*

**CJB Isaiah 11:1** *But a branch will emerge from the trunk of Yishai, a shoot will grow from his roots.*

**CJB Isaiah 11:10** *On that day the root of Yishai, which stands as a banner for the peoples- the Goyim will seek him out, and the place where he rests will be glorious.*

How appropriate it is that as we are but a handful of words from the end of the biblical canon that Yeshua continues to offer His invitation to the unsaved in verse 17. Interestingly Yeshua invokes the two agents that He uses to pass along His invitation to join His flock: the Spirit and the Bride. The Spirit is the Holy Spirit. The Bride is His Followers..... you, me, all who have turned to Christ for salvation. Of course in Revelation the Bride is spoken of as those who are part of the New Jerusalem. But in modern language this is speaking of Believers. We Believers, with the power and direction of the Holy Spirit, are responsible to tell the world the truth, even though most do not want to hear it. Our job is only to obey; and in this case obedience is to speak the truth of the Gospel to the unsaved. Our job is NOT to persuade or to save; that is the job of the Holy Spirit. And what Good News it is that we bring. Salvation means coming just as you are. It means that the cost for your forgiveness has been paid by another. "Let anyone who is thirsty to take a drink of the water of life **free of charge**". There has never been another message or offer such as this in history, and never will there be. But there is a consequence for refusing this offer or, just as bad, perverting the message. That is what verses 18 and 19 are about.

The words of John's book are never to be added to or God Himself will take action against the perpetrators by visiting all the plagues that Revelation threatens upon them. God's message is complete and perfect as it stands and no amount of good intent to add to it will be tolerated. It is interesting to me that the same warning was given as regards the Books of Moses; the Torah.

**CJB Deuteronomy 13:1** *"Everything I am commanding you, you are to take care to do. Do not add to it or subtract from it.*

A further warning against tampering with His Word in verse 19 promises that should anyone treat God's Word and message carelessly and have the arrogance to want to make changes to its meaning, intent, and content then God will remove what would have otherwise been theirs: the Tree of Life and the right to live in the New Jerusalem. Folks, these two verses are aimed directly at our Christian and Messianic institutions. This is a warning to Believers, not to the unsaved. It is a warning of losing our salvation.

Since the 1st century there have been honest and sincere efforts by Apostles, congregation leaders, scholars and commentators to delve into God's Word and extract from it proper understanding. But there have also been insincere and dishonest attempts to try to make God's Word conform to manmade agendas and traditions. It is not the former but rather the latter that this warning from Yeshua is aimed. We are human; I am human. Error is inevitable and (thankfully!) it is forgivable. But deciding that our human intellect outweighs God's perfection is not forgivable and the cost of such deceit and folly is everything that matters.

And finally, to end this Apocalypse, it is reinforced as to why reading this book is so important. Yeshua, who certifies that this entire message is from Him..... He who has previously said that we can count on these words as trustworthy and true.... says He **is** coming soon! So be awake; be aware; and most importantly, be ready.

Amen! Come Lord Yeshua.