

## REVELATION 20 - 22

Here is a quick overview of the last series of events.

1) After the beast and his armies are defeated (the armies slaughtered and the beasts thrown alive into the lake of fire), there is a further action taken by an angel (commissioned by the white Rider) holding the key to the bottomless pit. He takes the dragon or ancient serpent (the Devil or Satan), the one who gave his authority to the beast in the first place, and throws him back into his pit, locking the entrance. This then allows for a period of time (1,000 yrs) of uncontested peace and tranquillity to take place. At this point there is a resurrection of all those who have been killed for their faithfulness, and they are given rule over the earth and its inhabitants for 1,000 yrs.

When the 1,000 yrs are ended, Satan is permitted to come out of his pit and to deceive the nations once more, all leading up to a final battle. The nations under Satan's rule, all gather around the earthly Jerusalem where the saints and the angels are. God sends fire from heaven and destroys all these armies, but the devil is taken and thrown into the lake of fire, to join the beasts.

After this comes the judgement. Everyone is judged according to their deeds and their faithfulness to God or lack thereof. An accounting has already been taking place because names are already written in the book of life or they are not. God has been watching from the foundation of the world. Those whose names are not written in the book of life are thrown into the lake of fire as well. But how many people are we talking about? It's one thing for death and Hades, for the beasts and the dragon to be thrown into hell, for there is no space for evil in the new creation. But human creatures of God as well? And if everyone's name is already written in the book of life why would the whole of Revelation be a continuing appeal for more and more people to repent and come into the sphere of God's infinite, forgiving love? Let us see whether there is more...

Chapter 20 concludes the bad news, making way for chapters 21-22 to introduce the wonderful, good news of the future, for those who believe and stand firm. 21: 3-4 and others too. These are some of the most beautiful and comforting verses in all of scripture speaking of God's presence and comfort to those who suffer and have suffered.

1) There is a renewed heaven and earth with a new Jerusalem coming down from heaven. God will now inhabit the city and the earth, so much so that there is no need for a temple and a holy of holies (which kept God set apart from the people). Now everyone is a priest and God is among them all. There is no need for sun or light for God's glory permeates the city.

2) The new Jerusalem is vast (1500 miles long on all 4 sides). The 12 gates and 12 foundations represent the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles, indicating the unity of Old and New Testaments

as being fulfilled in the Lamb's conquest and the renewal of the earth. Creation has finally come to its intended goal. The promised land is found. The Garden of Eden is finally inhabited and the tree of life brings eternity to all the inhabitants.

3) There are still nations and people throughout the new earth and outside the new Jerusalem. Are these not cast into the lake of fire? It seems there is still room for many in the new heaven and the new earth, even those who are not martyrs for the faith. Revelation doesn't resolve this, but it is an inclusive vision making room for many peoples.

4) the tree of life is a source of healing for all the nations, perhaps indicating that those outside the new Jerusalem will continue to need healing and will now find its source. The saving work of God (salvation means wholeness) will continue until all are healed.

5) The vision ends with an appeal for the Lamb, Jesus, to come swiftly. The saints are longing for relief. What they receive in the interim is a basis for hope and confidence through the vision that is Revelation.

#### FINAL COMMENTS:

- The Lamb is described as being drenched with the blood of his foes whereas in the gospels, Christ sheds his blood for the sins of the world - vengeance vs forgiveness, raw justice vs mercy. How are these two reconciled? My choice is with the sermon on the mount and Jesus on the cross rather than Revelation at this point. Without forgiveness as the last word there is no final hope, and God's vision is not fulfilled. At the same time, Revelation keeps referring to vast multitudes of people who will turn to God and the appeal throughout Revelation is for people to turn away from the wicked ways of empire to the ways of love and mercy – the righteousness of the saints.

- There was a widespread belief and expectation that the Messiah would reign for a limited period on earth before the end. The duration of this rule varied, from 40 yrs to 400 yrs to 1,000 yrs. For fundamentalist literalists there is a division between pre-millennialists (1000 yr reign will happen before the final rapture) and post-millennialists (it will happen after). Revelation is not clear on this point.

- There are many important references in the vision taken or adapted from Ezekiel and Isaiah (e.g. ' the hosts of Gog and Magog that gather against the armies of the lamb, also has reference in Ezekiel 38-39; the new heavens and the new earth are referred to in Isaiah 65:17; the ancient serpent (Satan) appears in the garden of Eden to Adam and Eve. The vision of Revelation 22 is not just a reconstructed Jerusalem but a restored Eden with the tree of life (immortality) being readily available for all to partake).

- The lake of fire - in different parts of the New Testament, fire has a meaning of purification rather than destruction. In the case of Revelation, it is eternal punishment. Hell, or eternal punishment is like an eternal banishment of evil. In order to have heaven on earth or a new

Eden, there can't be any more room for evil to deceive human beings and poison their spirits.

- God's vision from the beginning of creation and reflected in the garden, is total and intimate communion with all creation. The vision of Revelation imagines this to be the result. There will be kings and nations and life as we know it here, except God will rule rather than some world emperor.

- References to stones/jewels. The priests of the temple had breast plates with these 12 jewels, each inscribed with a name of a tribe. The priests would go into the holy of holies and mediate before God on behalf of the people. In the new Jerusalem, the stones are the adornments of the whole city, implying that access to God is now open, everywhere, for all inhabitants. The holy of holies in the sanctum of the temple is now everywhere. All of creation is suffused with the presence of God.

- The Spirit and the bride. The bride is the whole community of God's people. The Spirit is the spirit of prophecy that speaks through John. These two encourage the hearers of the vision to cry 'come'. 'Ask and it shall be given.' Persistence in praying our needs is an important teaching in the scriptures. God answers the thirsty heart. What do you pray for? How is prayer answered in your life?

Come, Holy Spirit, come.  
Amen.