

NOON BIBLE STUDY: REVELATION 22 (PART 1)

WE HAVE SEEN JOHN'S DESCRIPTION OF THE "HOLY CITY, THE NEW JERUSALEM" WHICH WILL COME OUT OF HEAVEN TO THE EARTH. IT WAS A CITY OF PERFECTION, BEAUTY AND GLORIOUS ILLUMINATION BY GOD HIMSELF. IT IS IN CONTRAST TO THE CITY OF BABYLON WHICH REVELATION HAS SPOKEN OF AT LENGTH. IN THE AGE TO COME, THERE WILL BE A LITERAL CITY FROM WHICH GOD WILL REIGN, BUT WE ALSO RECOGNIZE THAT THERE IS A SYMBOLIC CONTRAST BETWEEN THE SYSTEM OF BABYLON (THE KINGDOM OF THIS WORLD) WHICH IS SATURATING OUR CURRENT WORLD, AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD (NEW JERUSALEM) WHICH WILL OVERTAKE AND OVERWHELM THE FORCES OF DARKNESS.

AND SO THE READER IS PRESENTED WITH A STARK CONTRAST THROUGH WHICH A CLEAR CHOICE IS PRESENTED. EACH PERSON IS EITHER ALIGNED WITH BABYLON OR THE KINGDOM OF GOD, A CHILD OF DARKNESS OR A CHILD OF LIGHT (ACTS 26:18; EPHESIANS 5:8; 1 THESSALONIANS 5:5). FOLLOWERS OF JESUS ARE SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE REALM OF BABYLON NOW, LIVING AS STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS (HEBREWS 11:13; 1 PETER 2:11) AND CALLED AS AMBASSADORS FOR KING JESUS (2 CORINTHIANS 5:20). THEIR "CITIZENSHIP" IS IN HEAVEN (PHILIPPIANS 3:20), MEANING THEY MIGHT RESIDE IN VARIOUS NATIONS OF THIS WORLD, THIS WORLD IS *NOT* THEIR HOME, NOR DOES IT SHAPE THEIR IDENTITY.

HOWEVER, A DISTINCT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BABYLON AND THE NEW JERUSALEM IS THAT THERE IS NO INTERMINGLING IN THE HOLY CITY. ALL HINTS OR WHISPERS OF EVIL WILL BE EXTINGUISHED SO THAT ONLY RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HOLINESS WILL REMAIN. CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING VERSES:

MATTHEW 13:41-43 - "THE SON OF MAN WILL SEND FORTH HIS ANGELS, AND THEY WILL GATHER OUT OF HIS KINGDOM ALL STUMBLING BLOCKS, AND THOSE WHO COMMIT LAWLESSNESS, 42 AND WILL THROW THEM INTO THE FURNACE OF FIRE; IN THAT PLACE THERE WILL BE WEEPING AND GNASHING OF TEETH. 43 "THEN THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN IN THE KINGDOM OF THEIR FATHER. HE WHO HAS EARS, LET HIM HEAR.

2 PETER 3:13 - BUT ACCORDING TO HIS PROMISE WE ARE LOOKING FOR NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH, IN WHICH RIGHTEOUSNESS DWELLS.

REVELATION 21:6-8 - THEN 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. 7 "HE WHO OVERCOMES WILL INHERIT THESE THINGS, AND I WILL BE HIS GOD AND HE WILL BE MY SON. 8 "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."

REVELATION 21:27 - AND NOTHING UNCLEAN, AND NO ONE WHO PRACTICES ABOMINATION AND LYING, SHALL EVER COME INTO (THE NEW JERUSALEM), BUT ONLY THOSE WHOSE NAMES ARE WRITTEN IN THE LAMB'S BOOK OF LIFE.

WHEN GOD'S KINGDOM COMES, WHEN GOD'S WILL IS DONE ON THE EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN, GOD WILL MAKE ALL THINGS NEW, AND THE OLD OR FORMER THINGS (THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE COMMONPLACE IN OUR CURRENT AGE) WILL "PASS AWAY" (REVELATION 21:1-5). WHAT WILL REMAIN WILL BE A REMADE CREATION WHICH WILL NOT ONLY REFLECT GOD'S GLORY, BUT WILL ALSO AFFIRM GOD'S ORIGINAL INTENTION FOR HIS CREATION. AND THAT BRINGS US TO REVELATION 22.

REVELATION 22:1-5 - PARADISE RESTORED

Q - WHAT ASPECTS OF THIS DESCRIPTION BRINGS TO MIND GOD'S ORIGINAL CREATION IN EDEN?

IT SEEMS LIKE REVELATION 22 IS DESCRIBING A BETTER VERSION OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN WHICH WILL SERVE AS THE FOREVER HOME OF GOD'S PEOPLE. LIFE AND GOODNESS ARE REPEATED THEMES AND A TON OF PROPHETIC WORDS ARE BEING REFERENCED AND FULFILLED. IT MIGHT BE A GOOD EXERCISE TO READ THE FULLER CONTEXTS OF THESE SECTIONS, BUT LET'S CONSIDER HOW MUCH IS CULMINATING IN THIS FINAL CHAPTER. HERE ARE THE MAJOR THEMES OF THESE VERSES:

1 - RIVER/WATER OF LIFE: WATER IS A SYMBOL OF AND A CRITICAL RESOURCE FOR LIFE. THE ABSENCE OF WATER IS CORRELATED TO DRYNESS AND DEATH. SCRIPTURALLY, THE HOLY SPIRIT IS OFTEN COMPARED TO FLOWING/LIVING WATER. HERE IS WHAT GOD SHOWED THE PROPHET EZEKIEL ABOUT THE FUTURE:

EZEKIEL 47:1-12 (NLT) - IN MY VISION, THE MAN BROUGHT ME BACK TO THE ENTRANCE OF THE TEMPLE. THERE I SAW A STREAM FLOWING EAST FROM BENEATH THE DOOR OF THE TEMPLE AND PASSING TO THE RIGHT OF THE ALTAR ON ITS SOUTH SIDE. 2 THE MAN BROUGHT ME OUTSIDE THE WALL THROUGH THE NORTH GATEWAY AND LED ME AROUND TO THE EASTERN ENTRANCE. THERE I COULD SEE THE WATER FLOWING OUT THROUGH THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE EAST GATEWAY.

3 MEASURING AS HE WENT, HE TOOK ME ALONG THE STREAM FOR 1,750 FEET AND THEN LED ME ACROSS. THE WATER WAS UP TO MY ANKLES. 4 HE MEASURED OFF ANOTHER 1,750 FEET AND LED ME ACROSS AGAIN. THIS TIME THE WATER WAS UP TO MY KNEES. AFTER ANOTHER 1,750 FEET, IT WAS UP TO MY WAIST. 5 THEN HE MEASURED ANOTHER 1,750 FEET, AND THE RIVER WAS TOO DEEP TO WALK ACROSS. IT WAS DEEP ENOUGH TO SWIM IN, BUT TOO DEEP TO WALK THROUGH. 6 HE ASKED ME, "HAVE YOU BEEN WATCHING, SON OF MAN?" THEN HE LED ME BACK ALONG THE RIVERBANK.

7 WHEN I RETURNED, I WAS SURPRISED BY THE SIGHT OF MANY TREES GROWING ON BOTH SIDES OF THE RIVER. 8 THEN HE SAID TO ME, "THIS RIVER FLOWS EAST THROUGH THE DESERT INTO THE VALLEY OF THE DEAD SEA. THE WATERS OF THIS STREAM WILL MAKE THE SALTY WATERS OF THE DEAD SEA FRESH AND PURE. 9 THERE WILL BE SWARMS OF LIVING THINGS WHEREVER THE WATER OF THIS RIVER FLOWS. FISH WILL ABOUND IN THE DEAD SEA, FOR ITS WATERS WILL BECOME FRESH. LIFE WILL FLOURISH WHEREVER THIS WATER FLOWS. 10 FISHERMEN WILL STAND ALONG THE SHORES OF THE DEAD SEA. ALL THE WAY FROM EN-GEDI TO EN-EGLAIM, THE SHORES WILL BE COVERED WITH NETS DRYING IN THE SUN. FISH OF EVERY KIND WILL FILL THE DEAD SEA, JUST AS THEY FILL THE MEDITERRANEAN. 11 BUT THE MARSHES AND SWAMPS WILL NOT BE PURIFIED; THEY WILL STILL BE SALTY.

12 FRUIT TREES OF ALL KINDS WILL GROW ALONG BOTH SIDES OF THE RIVER. THE LEAVES OF THESE TREES WILL NEVER TURN BROWN AND FALL, AND THERE WILL ALWAYS BE FRUIT ON THEIR BRANCHES. THERE WILL BE A NEW CROP EVERY MONTH, FOR THEY ARE WATERED BY THE RIVER FLOWING FROM THE TEMPLE. THE FRUIT WILL BE FOR FOOD AND THE LEAVES FOR HEALING.

2 - LIGHT IS ALSO REPRESENTATIVE OF LIFE AND HOLINESS AND TRUTH. IN CONTRAST DARKNESS IS WHERE EVIL DWELLS AND RELATED TO DEATH. ZECHARIAH PROPHESED ABOUT THIS DAY:

ZECHARIAH 14:6-11 (NLT) - ON THAT DAY THE SOURCES OF LIGHT WILL NO LONGER SHINE, 7 YET THERE WILL BE CONTINUOUS DAY! ONLY THE LORD KNOWS HOW THIS COULD HAPPEN. THERE WILL BE NO NORMAL DAY AND NIGHT, FOR AT EVENING TIME IT WILL STILL BE LIGHT. 8 ON THAT DAY LIFE-GIVING WATERS WILL FLOW OUT FROM JERUSALEM, HALF TOWARD THE DEAD SEA AND HALF TOWARD THE MEDITERRANEAN,

FLOWING CONTINUOUSLY IN BOTH SUMMER AND WINTER. 9 AND THE LORD WILL BE KING OVER ALL THE EARTH. ON THAT DAY THERE WILL BE ONE LORD-- HIS NAME ALONE WILL BE WORSHIPED.

10 ALL THE LAND FROM GEBA, NORTH OF JUDAH, TO RIMMON, SOUTH OF JERUSALEM, WILL BECOME ONE VAST PLAIN. BUT JERUSALEM WILL BE RAISED UP IN ITS ORIGINAL PLACE AND WILL BE INHABITED ALL THE WAY FROM THE BENJAMIN GATE OVER TO THE SITE OF THE OLD GATE, THEN TO THE CORNER GATE, AND FROM THE TOWER OF HANANEL TO THE KING'S WINEPRESSES. 11 AND JERUSALEM WILL BE FILLED, SAFE AT LAST, NEVER AGAIN TO BE CURSED AND DESTROYED.

3 - "NO MORE CURSE" IS A REFERENCE TO THE REMOVAL OF THE CURSE THAT WAS PRONOUNCED AFTER THE FALL OF ADAM AND EVE. THIS IS ALSO CONNECTED WITH THE REFERENCE TO THE REAPPEARANCE OF THE "TREE OF LIFE" AND THE EVENTUAL REALITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE SEEING HIS FACE. HERE IS WHAT GOD SAID IN GENESIS 3:

GENESIS 3:14-20 (NLT) - THEN THE LORD GOD SAID TO THE SERPENT, "BECAUSE YOU HAVE DONE THIS, YOU ARE CURSED MORE THAN ALL ANIMALS, DOMESTIC AND WILD. YOU WILL CRAWL ON YOUR BELLY, GROVELING IN THE DUST AS LONG AS YOU LIVE. 15 AND I WILL CAUSE HOSTILITY BETWEEN YOU AND THE WOMAN, AND BETWEEN YOUR OFFSPRING AND HER OFFSPRING. HE WILL STRIKE YOUR HEAD, AND YOU WILL STRIKE HIS HEEL."

16 THEN HE SAID TO THE WOMAN, "I WILL SHARPEN THE PAIN OF YOUR PREGNANCY, AND IN PAIN YOU WILL GIVE BIRTH. AND YOU WILL DESIRE TO CONTROL YOUR HUSBAND, BUT HE WILL RULE OVER YOU."

17 AND TO THE MAN HE SAID, "SINCE YOU LISTENED TO YOUR WIFE AND ATE FROM THE TREE WHOSE FRUIT I COMMANDED YOU NOT TO EAT, THE GROUND IS CURSED BECAUSE OF YOU. ALL YOUR LIFE YOU WILL STRUGGLE TO SCRATCH A LIVING FROM IT. 18 IT WILL GROW THORNS AND THISTLES FOR YOU, THOUGH YOU WILL EAT OF ITS GRAINS. 19 BY THE SWEAT OF YOUR BROW WILL YOU HAVE FOOD TO EAT UNTIL YOU RETURN TO THE GROUND FROM WHICH YOU WERE MADE. FOR YOU WERE MADE FROM DUST, AND TO DUST YOU WILL RETURN."

THE CURSE:

- 1 - THE DEVIL WOULD BE IN A BATTLE WITH HUMANS
- 2 - WOMAN WOULD EXPERIENCE PAIN IN CHILDBIRTH
- 3 - WOMAN WILL LOOK TO BE COMPLETE THROUGH RELATIONSHIP WITH HER HUSBAND
- 4 - MAN WILL LOOK TO BE COMPLETE THROUGH WORK
- 5 - WORK WILL BE HARD, UNPRODUCTIVE AND PAINFUL
- 6 - THE EARTH IS CURSED AND CORRUPTION OF THE ORIGINAL CREATION TARNISHED
- 7 - HUMANS WILL DIE

THESE THINGS ARE SEEN ALL AROUND US IN THE WORLD WE NOW LIVE IN AND THEY MAKE LIFE DIFFICULT AND HARD, AND END WITH 10 OUT OF 10 PEOPLE DYING. HOWEVER, THE GREATEST CONSEQUENCE OF THE CURSE THAT CAME BECAUSE OF SIN IS THE BROKEN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. HERE'S HOW GENESIS 3 CONCLUDES:

GENESIS 3:22-24 (NLT) - THEN THE LORD GOD SAID, "LOOK, THE HUMAN BEINGS HAVE BECOME LIKE US, KNOWING BOTH GOOD AND EVIL. WHAT IF THEY REACH OUT, TAKE FRUIT FROM THE TREE OF LIFE, AND EAT IT? THEN THEY WILL LIVE FOREVER!" 23 SO THE LORD GOD BANISHED THEM FROM THE GARDEN OF EDEN, AND HE SENT ADAM OUT TO CULTIVATE THE GROUND FROM WHICH HE HAD BEEN MADE. 24 AFTER

SENDING THEM OUT, THE LORD GOD STATIONED MIGHTY CHERUBIM TO THE EAST OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN. AND HE PLACED A FLAMING SWORD THAT FLASHED BACK AND FORTH TO GUARD THE WAY TO THE TREE OF LIFE.

HUMANS ARE EXPELLED FROM THE GARDEN OF EDEN, LOSING NOT ONLY THEIR ABILITY TO ACCESS THE TREE OF LIFE (WHICH APPARENTLY WAS HOW THEY WERE GOING TO BE ABLE TO LIVE FOREVER) BUT ALSO MARKING THE END OF THEIR CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. THE PLACE THAT GOD HAD CREATED TO BE THEIR HOME AND TO BE THE PLACE OF COMMUNION WITH HIM IS NOW BEING GUARDED BY A MIGHTY ANGEL WITH A FLAMING SWORD!

WITH THE CURSE ENDING IN REVELATION 22, THE RAMIFICATIONS OF THE CURSE END. THE TREE OF LIFE RETURNS ENABLING HUMANS TO BE HEALED AND LIVE FOREVER, THE CREATION WILL BE RESTORED WITH WATER AND LIGHT IN ABUNDANCE - AND GOD HIMSELF IS ON THE EARTH WITH HIS PEOPLE - FACE TO FACE. THIS IS THE GREATEST PART OF ETERNAL LIFE.

THE HOPE OF GOD'S PEOPLE IS TO DWELL IN THE HOLY CITY, THE NEW JERUSALEM. WE WILL REIGN WITH GOD AS PRIESTLY KINGS AND QUEENS. THE CITY WILL BE BEAUTIFUL AND FREE FROM ALL THREATS OR EVEN THOUGHTS OF EVIL, SUFFERING OR TROUBLE. IT WILL BE FULL OF JOY AND PEACE AND THE PRAISES OF GOD. THE CREATION WILL BE MADE NEW WITH LIFE AND FERTILITY ABOUNDING. THE TREE OF LIFE WILL BLOOM PROFUSELY. HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS WILL BE MADE RIGHT WITH ENVY, STRIFE AND CONFLICT ENDING. THE ANIMAL KINGDOM WILL LIVE IN HARMONY AS WELL. ALL OF THE FAITHFUL PEOPLE OF GOD WILL BE TOGETHER, RESURRECTED TO ETERNAL LIFE. THE SAINTS WILL BE LIVING WITH NEW BODIES, FREE FROM PAIN OR LIMITATIONS. THE UNRESTRAINED GLORY OF GOD WILL BE ENOUGH TO SEND THE SUN INTO RETIREMENT.

BUT, THE BEST PART OF ETERNAL LIFE IS THAT GOD HIMSELF WILL BE AMONG US. THAT IS THE BEST PART OF ETERNAL LIFE. AND THIS IS GOD'S PLAN FOR YOU. HE WANTS TO BE WITH YOU FOREVER AND HAS DONE ALL THAT IS NEEDED TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN FOR SURE. TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS CONTINUE FOR NOW, BUT GOD'S POWER IS GREATER. GOD'S COMMITMENT TO HIS PEOPLE IN GENERAL AND TO YOU SPECIFICALLY ARE UNQUESTIONABLE.

SO WHILE WE SWIM IN THE BABYLONIAN MUCK AROUND US - KEEP YOUR HEART ANCHORED IN THE HOPE OF THE COMING RIVER OF LIFE WHICH WILL WASH AWAY ALL THE DARKNESS AND DEATH. AND REMEMBER THAT THIS RIVER DOESN'T JUST FLOW TO BRING RENEWAL TO THE WORLD, WHICH IT WILL DO - THIS RIVER'S ORIGIN IS FROM THE THRONE OF GOD AND OF THE LAMB BECAUSE THEY WILL BE WITH US ON THAT DAY, FOREVER AND EVER.