

Revelation — Lesson 25

Where in the Bible is the most beautiful description of the Lord's church? Is it in Daniel 2, where we read about the eternal kingdom that sweeps away the kingdoms of the earth? Is it in Isaiah 2, where we read about the house of God established on the mountains to which all nations are drawn? Is it in Joel 2, where the establishment of the church is described as the great and awesome day of the Lord? Is it in Ezekiel 40, where the church is described as a huge temple constructed according to the pattern of God? Is it in Matthew 13, where Jesus gave us the parables of the kingdom? Is it in Matthew 16, where Jesus promised to build his church? Is it in Acts 2, where we read a firsthand account of the church's establishment? Is it in Ephesians 5, where Paul beautifully describes Jesus' love for his church as a husband's love for his bride? Is it in Hebrews 12, where the church is described as the city of the living God?

Each of these is beautiful, but none of these would be my choice for the most beautiful description of the church. Instead, I would turn immediately to the concluding two chapters of Revelation that we are now studying. In my opinion, those two chapters contain the most beautiful description of the Lord's church found anywhere in the Scriptures.

As we mentioned last week, the Old Testament ends with a curse in Malachi 4:6. The New Testament by contrast ends with a beautiful description of the Lord's church, the holy city of God in which God is at last able to once again dwell with men as he did in the Garden before the Fall. The final chapters of Revelation are the perfect ending to the story of reconciliation that began with the opening chapters of Genesis.

21:15 And he who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. 16 The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its breadth; and he measured the city with

his rod, twelve thousand stadia; its length and breadth and height are equal. 17 He also measured its wall, a hundred and forty-four cubits by a man's measure, that is, an angel's. 18 The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass. 19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every Jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. 21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass.

Here we have a description of the city – and it is remarkably numerical! It is also remarkably beautiful once we understand the symbols it uses.

Why is the city measured? Ezekiel measured what he saw in Ezekiel 40-43 in order to stress its holiness and separation from what is common. Ezekiel 42:20 — “He measured it by the four sides: it had a wall round about, five hundred reeds long, and five hundred broad, to make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane place.” Earlier, in Revelation 11, we saw the temple measured for the same reason. The church is measured here yet again for the same reason. The church belongs to God. The church is apart from the world. **And we are being measured by God today just as God was measuring the church in Revelation 21.** Do we measure up?

What are the measurements? The city is a cube — 12,000 by 12,000 by 12,000 stadia. This description causes trouble for literalists since 12,000 stadia is about 1500 miles. The walls surrounding the city are 144 stadia high. The foundations of the city are adorned with 12 precious jewels, and the 12 gates are made of 12 pearls. (Once again,

how could *anyone* not see the symbolism here? And if these numbers are symbolic, then what about the 1000 years we saw earlier? On what basis could someone conclude that all of these 12's are symbolic and yet that earlier 1000 is literal?)

As for the reference to an angel in verse 17, Hailey writes: "The measure 'according to a man, that is, of an angel,' is that it is a measure understood by man, one in common use be men, but in the hands of an angel."

The church is described as a precious and beautiful city in the shape of a huge golden cube with golden streets. The number 12 appears in every measurement — this city is for the people of God. The city of pure gold with streets of pure gold is not a description of Heaven — the text itself tells us that much! It is a description of the city of God that comes down *out of* Heaven. It is a description of the city where God presently dwells with his people — and that city is the church. John is describing the church!

We generally apply these descriptions to Heaven, and many no doubt could apply to that beautiful home that God has prepared for his church. But the context suggests that those descriptions are used here to describe the church — not the future home of the church. **John is describing a people — not a place!**

The church is the city of God — and how does God see his church? He sees it as a huge golden city with streets of gold. John is telling us how God sees his church! But am I saying that the church here and now has streets of gold? Yes! Am I saying that the church here and now is the city foursquare? Yes! That is exactly what I am saying. That is what I believe these beautiful chapters are telling us.

Do we see ourselves as God sees us? Do we truly understand how *beautiful* the church is? Do we truly understand how *important* the church is? We often say that Revelation shows us things we can't see (Heaven) in terms of things we can see (golden streets, etc.), but is that really what it happening here? If these chapters are describing the church, then isn't God really describing something we can see (the church) — and isn't he then telling us that we are not seeing it as it re-

ally is! Isn't he telling us that we are not seeing the church as the beautiful, golden city of God that it is. These chapters are giving us God's view of his church — and if that view is not our view, then we need to change our view!

22 And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, 25 and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; 26 they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. 27 But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Why is there no temple in the city? In the Old Testament the temple stressed the separation between God and man. God lived in the inner sanctuary where only the High Priest could enter. But in this city, God dwells with his people. In this city, there is no separation between God and man. In this city, every citizen has direct access to God through Jesus.

Why in verse 23 is there no need of the sun or the moon? Because the glory of God and the Lamb provide all of the light. Isaiah 60:19-20 uses this same image to describe the condition of Israel after the restoration of the temple and the holy city —

The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD

shall be thine everlasting light, and the days
of thy mourning shall be ended.

Verse 24 tells us that the nations shall walk by the light of this great city and that the kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honor into it. One would expect a huge golden cube 1500 miles long in each direction would reflect some light and attract some attention! It is not God's desire that his church be obscure and hidden.

God's view of the church and his mission for the church is to be a beautiful golden city that reflects his glory and gives light to a lost and dying world – and nowhere is that message stated any more clearly than it is here in these verses from Revelation 21. God's people in his church are the light of the world. The church reflects the glory of God, and all nations flow to the church because of that light.

- **Matthew 5:14** You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.
- **Isaiah 2:2** Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it.

Verse 27 tells us that nothing unclean will enter this city. The city is holy and secure. Only those who have been made clean by the blood of Christ are allowed to enter this city. No one enters this city until he has followed the command of Acts 22:16 — “Arise, and be baptized, and **wash away thy sins**, calling on the name of the Lord.”

The church is the body of Christ. People are added to the church when they are saved. If you have been saved, then you are in the Lord's church. If you are not in the Lord's church, it is because you are not saved. Those outside the Lord's church are unclean; those inside the Lord's church have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. The gates of this city are open — but you can enter those gates only after being cleansed by the blood of Christ. (Revelation 1:4-6)

Is it true that only the church of Christ will be saved? **Of course it's true! How could it possibly be otherwise?** If God adds you to the church when you are saved, then how could anyone outside the

church ever be saved? Everyone who is saved is in the church, and everyone who is lost is outside of the church. If people have trouble with the concept that only those in the church of Christ will be saved, then it tells me they do not understand what the church is. It tells me they think of the church of Christ as a denomination of some sort rather than as what it is — the eternal kingdom of Christ established on the first day of Pentecost following the resurrection. The world has many misconceptions about the church of Christ — let's make sure we don't contribute to them! If we use denominational language, sing denominational songs, and see ourselves as just another church on the block, then is it any wonder if the world sees us as a denomination? The church of Christ is not a denomination! It is the body of Christ, and can you think of a more horrible image than a denomination of the body of Christ?

We see in these verses an important clue as to whether these descriptions of the church describe the church then and now, or whether they apply only to the church in Heaven after the end of time. Verse 25 tells us that at the time of this vision, the gates of this great city are *open*, and verses 24 and 26 show people (kings, in particular) entering through those gates. Isaiah uses this same image in Isaiah 60:11 —

Therefore thy gates shall be open continually;
they shall not be shut day nor night; that men
may bring unto thee the forces of the Gen-
tiles, and that their kings may be brought.

Will this description be true of Heaven after the world ends? Will the gates of Heaven remain open? If so, for whom? Why does the church need an *open gate* after the end of the world?

Verse 24 tells us that by light of this city shall the nations walk. If this is a description of the church after the end of the world, then who are these nations? If this is a description of the church after the end of the world, then who are these kings of the earth who live outside the city in darkness yet are able to enter? The church on earth is the light of the world. The nations of the world are drawn to the city by the light that it casts out into the world. Recall the description of the church in Isaiah 2:2 —

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it.

So what have we seen in Chapter 21? This chapter has shown us the triumphant and victorious church on earth. The church shines among the nations and brings light to those living outside in darkness. The nations are drawn to it by the light that it casts. The description of the church will continue through the first five verses of Chapter 22.

Chapter Twenty Two

1 Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

What is the river of the water of life in verse 1? Water is a common symbol for the blessings of God, and one that we have seen before in this book. (Recall our comments about the feast of the tabernacles in Chapter 7.) In Isaiah 12:3, God's people were told that with joy they would draw water from the wells of salvation. In John 7:37-38, Jesus said that if anyone believed in him then that person would have rivers of living water flowing out of his heart. The water of life depicts the blessings that flow from God and that the church enjoys now and forever.

But has the church always enjoyed these blessings? Yes! Read Joel 3:18 — “And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the

LORD and water the valley of Shittim.” And then turn to Acts 2 to find out when that prophecy from Joel was fulfilled. The church has enjoyed those blessings from the day of its establishment.

In verse 2, we see a tree of life with 12 fruits. (First the water of *life*, and now the tree of *life*. Do we see a message there to a church that daily faced the threat of death from Rome?) This tree provides nourishment for God’s people just as the original tree of life did in the Garden. But this tree provides 12 different kinds of fruit 12 times a year. These blessings are for the people of God — and the church enjoys these blessings then, now, and always.

Verse 2 tells us something else about this tree of life — the leaves on the tree are for the healing of the nations. Again, we see nations that need the light and healing that this city—the church—provides. Who are these nations outside of the city if this is a description of the church in Heaven after the end of the world? If we are looking at the church in Heaven then who is it that needs healing — and from what are they being healed?

This is a description of the church on earth! The church sheds light on the darkness outside. The church provides healing to those who enter into its open gates. The invitation we will see in a moment in 22:17 is for those outside of the church (those who are thirsty) to come and drink of the water of life. (“And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price.”) Could such descriptions apply to the church after the end of the world?

3 There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; 4 they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. 5 And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.

Verse 3 tells us there will be no more curse. Zechariah 8:13 says that Israel and Judah were once “a byword of cursing among the nations.”

But God promised that he would make them a blessing instead of a curse, and Zechariah 14:11 says that “there shall be no more curse; Jerusalem shall dwell in security.” That is the same picture we have here. The church, too, would dwell in security.

Verse 3 also tells us that the throne of God and of the Lamb is in this city. God rules from his dwelling place — and God dwells in the church. Ezekiel 43:7 says that God’s throne is located where he dwells — in the midst of his people forever. Ephesians 2:22 describes the church as a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. The church is the eternal kingdom, and the eternal King dwells in his eternal kingdom.

Verse 4 tells us that those in the city shall see his face. Once again we have a beautiful description of the church here and now. The church is a royal priesthood, and as priests we have direct access to the throne. In fact, Hebrews 4:16 says that we may *boldly* approach the throne of grace. Every Christian has the same access to God as the High Priest had under the Old Covenant. In fact, we have more access — we may approach the throne boldly at any time whereas the High Priest could only enter the holy of holies once a year.

Verse 5 tells us that there will be no more night in this city. And what about the church? We are the light of the world. The church of Christ is the only source of light in a world of filled with darkness. There is no night in the church — how could there be with Jesus Christ as our light?

Verse 5 also tells us that the citizens of this city shall reign for ever and ever. Romans 5:17 says that we reign in life through Jesus Christ. Revelation 5:10 says that we are a kingdom of priests who reign on earth. 1 Peter 2:9 says that we are a royal priesthood. Notice the tense of those verbs. The church reigns with Christ *now* and forever.

What we are seeing in these verses is the triumphant, victorious church of Christ that reigns forever with Jesus on its side. The message to the first century church was not “Wait until the end of the world and you will enjoy these blessings.” The message to the first century church was that the church enjoys all of these spiritual blessings right here and right now. Isn’t that what Paul told us in Eph-

esians 1:3 — “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who **hath blessed** us with **all spiritual blessings in heavenly places** in Christ.” That was the message of comfort they needed to hear, and that was the message they heard.

6 And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place. 7 And behold, I am coming soon.” Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

Verse 6 begins the epilogue of the book, and as we saw in the prologue, the epilogue begins with the all-important time frame for the vision. Revelation 1:1 says that the events in the book must soon take place. Revelation 1:3 says that the time for fulfillment is near. Here in 22:6 we see that what John had seen must soon take place, and in verse 10 we will be told that the time is near.

What can be said for any interpretation of this book that ignores these clear declarations? One must certainly work hard to misunderstand them!

In verse 7, the speaker says “I am coming soon.” Who is the speaker in verses 6-7, and is there a different speaker in verse 7 than in verse 6? Some argue that the angel is speaking in verse 6 due to the third person reference to God. Others argue God or Jesus is speaking in verse 7 due to the first person reference to “I”. Others respond that in verse 7 an angel may simply be speaking on God’s behalf. Hailey concludes that it most likely is God “declaring that in Christ He will come speedily to His needy saints.”

In short, verses 6 and 7 in the original Greek are ambiguous with regard to the speaker’s identity, giving us only the pronoun translated “he.” People sometimes ask me why I don’t like the New International Version of the Bible. My answer is that I don’t trust it, and verse 6 is a prime example (repeated many, many times elsewhere in the NIV). Who is the speaker in verse 6? The KJV says “he.” The ESV says “he.” The ASV says “he.” The RSV says “he.” The NRSV says “he.” The

NKJV says “he.” The HCSB says “he.” The NAS says “he.” The REB says “he.” The original Greek is ambiguous, and those translations properly carry that ambiguity over into the English. But the NIV does not. The NIV in verse 6 reads “The angel said to me.” And so a reader of the NIV would have no idea that the Greek permitted any other understanding of that verse. The Greek is ambiguous, but the NIV is not. The goal of a translation is not to remove ambiguity from the original text. The goal of a translation is to carry any ambiguities in the original text over into English so that the English reader gets an understanding as close as possible to the meaning conveyed by the original text. A good translation acts a sheet of glass between you and the original text. The NIV utterly fails in that goal, and that is why I never use it.

<p>Rev. 22:6 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.”</p>	<p>Rev. 22:6 And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.</p>	<p>Rev. 22:6 And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.”</p>	<p>Rev. 22:6 And he said unto me, These words are faithful and true: and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angels to show unto his servants the things which must shortly come to pass.</p>	<p>Rev. 22:6 And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.”</p>
<p>Rev. 22:6 And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.”</p>	<p>Rev. 22:6 Then he said to me, “These words are faithful and true.” And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place.</p>	<p>Rev. 22:6 Then he said to me, “These words are faithful and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent His angel to show His servants what must quickly take place.”</p>	<p>Rev. 22:6 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.</p>	<p>Rev. 22:6 He said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord God who inspires the prophets has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.”</p>

The Greek word translated “soon” in verses 6 and 7 is the same word we find in the letters to the seven churches in 2:16 (“Repent; or else I will come unto thee **quickly**.”) and in 3:11 (“Behold, I come **quickly**: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”). If we try to stretch the word “quickly” to encompass Jesus’ return at the end of the world, then what do we do with those promises to the seven churches? Those seven churches aren’t around anymore! Either Jesus came quickly while they were still around, or he didn’t come to them at all.

The word “soon” (translated “speedily” or “quickly” in the KJV) occurs four times in this chapter! (Verses 6, 7, 12, and 20.) The same Greek

word appears in 1:1 and 3:11. The Greek lexicons tell us it means “pertaining to a point of time subsequent to another point of time (either an event in the discourse or the time of the discourse itself), with emphasis upon the relatively brief interval between the two points of time” or simply “a very brief period of time.” The same Greek word occurs twice in Matthew 28:7-8 —

And go **quickly**, and tell his discip̄les that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. And they departed **quickly** from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his discip̄les word.

Any doubt what the word means in that context? It also appears in John 11:28-29 —

And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee. As soon as she heard that, she arose **quickly**, and came unto him.

Any doubt what it means in that context? The same author wrote verses 6 and 7! What basis is there for us to interpret those verses in such a way that they mean the very opposite? Jesus said he was coming quickly. If that doesn't match our understanding of the book, then let's change our understanding rather than changing the text!

For those who believe these chapters apply to the end of time, let me ask a question — what could God have written here to convince you otherwise? If using the word “quickly” four times in a single chapter doesn't do it, then what would it take? (See the handout.)

But some will ask, to what does this word “soon” refer in verse 7? In what way did Jesus come soon or come quickly after the book was written? We already know the answer to that one — Jesus came in judgment against Rome.

But verse 7 must be referring to the second coming? Right? No. For starters, the phrase “second coming of Christ” appears nowhere in the

Bible. The closest we get is Hebrews 9:28 — “So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall **he appear the second time** without sin unto salvation.” Will Jesus appear again to judge the world? Absolutely. Will that be his second appearance? Yes. Will that be his second *literal* coming? Yes. Will that be his second coming? No, there have already been at least two other *figurative* comings of Christ. There was the *figurative* coming of Christ against Jerusalem mentioned in Matthew 24:30, and there was the *figurative* coming of Christ against Rome mentioned here in verse 7. The coming against Jerusalem happened in the first century (Matthew 24:34), and the coming against Rome happened soon after this book was written (22:6-7).

For those keeping track, verse 7 is the sixth of the seven beatitudes in Revelation. “Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

8 I John am he who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me; 9 but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”

John has been told before not to worship this angel and yet here he is doing it again. We have already discussed this issue and concluded that John was likely just overcome by all that he was seeing. But once again God uses the event to teach a vital lesson — Worship God!

This book of Revelation has been filled with false gods and false worship. Christians were facing death because of their refusal to worship the Roman emperors. No created being is worthy of our worship — not even this wondrous angelic being.

10 And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. 11 Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and

the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.” 12 “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” 14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. 15 Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and every one who loves and practices falsehood.

In verse 10, John is told *not* to seal up the book. Why? Because the time for its fulfillment is near. In Daniel 8:26, Daniel received the *opposite* command regarding a vision that he had just seen — “And the vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: **wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days.**” God tells John not to seal up his vision for the time of its fulfillment is near, but he tells Daniel to seal up his vision because its fulfillment pertains to many days hence. When was Daniel’s vision fulfilled? 400 years later. Could this be any more clear? How can we expect to ever understand this book if we ignore these flashing neon time frames?

In verse 11, Jesus tells the wicked to continue in their wickedness. Why? Because their time is short. Verse 12 says the Jesus is coming quickly! The Romans were so entrenched in their evil that Jesus knew they would never change. He tells them that if they want to do more wickedness then they had better hurry. The time is short! Again, this verse is difficult to apply to the end of the world. Does Jesus want all sinners to continue sinning?

And how does one enter into this city? Verse 14 tells us — “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.” One obtains the right to enter the city by *washing*. That, too, has been true since the day the church was established. Acts 2:38 — “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, **and be baptized every one of you in the name of**

Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Acts 22:16 — “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and **wash away thy sins**, calling on the name of the Lord.”

The beatitude in verse 14 is the seventh and final beatitude in Revelation. (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14) As we have mentioned before, this book has a beautiful structure and organization that is built around the number 7. If you are reading the KJV, then verse 14 reads “Blessed are they that do his commandments” rather than “Blessed are those who wash their robes.” The latter (I am told) has better support in the manuscripts.

16 “I Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.” 17 The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let him who hears say, “Come.” And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price.

Jesus is the root and the offspring of David. He is the promised Redeemer. He is the fulfillment of prophecy.

The Spirit and the church invite those outside to come and drink the water of life. When is this invitation extended? Now. It is extended every time a gospel sermon is preached from this pulpit (which we would hope is every time a sermon is preached from this pulpit!). No invitation will be extended after the end of the world.

The water of life is a blessing that men enjoy on earth when they come to Christ and are added to his church. It is without price — it is the free gift of God’s grace. Romans 5:18 — “Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one **the free gift** came upon all men unto justification of life.”

18 I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one

adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, 19 and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

Tampering with the word of God is serious business. Those who add to the words in this book by teaching things in Christ's name that Christ never taught will find themselves sharing in the horrible plagues described in this book. And those who take away from the words in this book the parts they disagree with or the parts that don't fit with their theories will lose their share in the tree of life and in the holy city.

What? You mean the right to the tree of life can be taken away? Yes, and we have already seen that one's name can be blotted out of the book of life. What does that tell us about the doctrine of "once saved, always saved"?

Whenever I read these verses I think of the Reader's Digest condensed Bible that was released in 1982. The Old Testament was cut by 55% and the New Testament by 25%. Except for Philemon, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude, every book in the Bible was condensed to some degree. (Apparently those four were short enough already. I guess Obadiah had some fluff!) I have always wondered if verse 19 made it into the condensed Bible but I have never taken the time to find out.

But with all humor aside, let me ask a serious question — do we effectively use an abridged Bible? Are there parts of the Bible we never study either because of neglect, or worse just because we don't much like what they say? Do we neglect some books just because they are too long to fit into our carefully tailored curriculum? When was the last time we had a class on Isaiah?

20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! 21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

The book ends with encouragement for those suffering persecution. They had nothing to fear. Jesus was coming soon to bring vindication and judgment and nothing would stand in his way be it the mighty Roman empire or the modern commentator who believes the rescue has yet to occur! Jesus said he was coming soon, and he did come soon. The Roman empire is no more — swept away long ago by the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ! What a beautiful ending to a beautiful book! Amen!

Conclusion

During our introductory classes I pointed to Revelation 6:10 and said that it is a key verse in this book. In Revelation 6:9-10, we read:

I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

The cry from the martyrs in verse 10 is what prompted these judgments, and God's repeated answer to their question "How long?" was "Soon!"

The martyrs in verses 9-10 play a central role in this book. Who were they? Most of them are unknown to us by name — but not all of them.

We know the names of some of those martyrs, and there are two in particular I think of when I read those verses. Tradition tells us that the Apostle Paul was beheaded by the emperor Nero in A.D. 64 or 65. Tradition also tells us that Peter was crucified in Rome around that same time. Paul was most likely saved from that fate by his Roman citizenship.

Revelation 17:6 — "I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." That is Paul's

blood. That is Peter's blood. Revelation 6:9 — "When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held." Peter and Paul were under that altar. Peter and Paul were asking the question "How long?" in verse 10. Revelation 18:20 — "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!" That's addressed to the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter. Revelation 21:14 — "Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." That's Paul's name and Peter's name.

This vivid book becomes even more vivid when we put a face on those martyrs. Yes, Jesus loves his church more than we can ever know or understand, and we can read this book as Jesus' response to Rome's attack against the church. But this was also Jesus' response to Rome's murder of Paul. This was Jesus' response to Rome's murder of Peter.

What was Paul thinking about as he was led to the executioner's block? I am certain it included what he told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:6-8 —

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is **at hand**. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

But I am also certain it included something he wrote to the very Christians who would suffer with him at the hands of Nero. Something that other Christian martyrs no doubt also recalled as they were being put to death by Rome. Something that is a beautiful summary of the entire book of Revelation. Something that we will use to end our class. Romans 8:31-39 —

What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will

he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In those 9 verses is the entire book of Revelation. We are more than conquerors through him who loved us! That is the theme of Revelation.