

*(Final)*

## PREFACE

The first five verses of Revelation Chapter Twenty-two are a continuation from Chapter Twenty-one of the description of the eternal state in the new Jerusalem, as if what we have here is either another awkward chapter division—or, better yet, both chapters are meant to be one. For both chapters alternate between description of life on the new earth and a direct exchange with their readers, as outlined below.

Descriptive Narrative	A Plea to the Readers of this Prophecy
21:1-5	
	21:6-8
21:9-23	
	21:24-27
22:1-5	
	22:6-7
<i>an angelic rebuke (22:8-9)</i>	
	22:10-21

## THE RIVER OF THE WATER AND THE TREE OF LIFE

**Have someone read Revelation 22:1-5.**

Continuing from v23 in Chapter Twenty-one, an angel—presumably the angel from 21:9-10—shows the apostle John more details from that main, central street described in 21:21, “And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.”

Much has been made of this river and its accompanying tree by expositors and commentators. The river *seems* to hearken back to the river flowing out of Jerusalem after the world has been reshaped and Christ returns to rule in the Millennium ([Zechariah 14:8](#))—which is why not a few interpreters say this *is* the Millennium. The imagery is, of course, similar, but this is a different sort of “river.” And the tree reminds us of the “tree of life” mentioned in the Eden narrative as situated in the center of the garden in [Genesis 2:9](#). Some say this is the heavenly version of that same tree.

It is possible that both of these—the river and the tree—can be interpreted literally: an actual crystalline river running down the center of the street from the thrones of “God and the Lamb,” and a literal tree bearing year-round fruit. But I believe the better interpretation is that both of these—the river and the tree—are visions representing timeless truths—both of which pertain to redemption and eternal life in Christ, spoken of throughout Scripture.

### *The River of the Water of Life*

In the prophecy of Jeremiah, Yahweh expresses anger and disbelief over Israel’s rejection of Him.

“Be appalled, O heavens, at this,  
And shudder, be very desolate,” declares the LORD.  
“For My people have committed two evils:  
They have forsaken Me,  
The fountain of living waters,  
To hew for themselves cisterns,  
Broken cisterns  
That can hold no water.” (Jeremiah 2:12–13)

Here the “living waters” represents the life Israel would enjoy if it would just obey and worship the Lord, rather than other gods; Yahweh refers to Himself as the “fountain” of those living waters. In the John 4 scene with the Samaritan woman, Jesus says to her,

“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water” (John 4:10).

She thinks He is speaking of water to drink, but Jesus goes on to explain,

“Everyone who drinks of this water [the well water] will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life” (John 4:13-14).

Thus the idea of “living water” moves from obedience to Yahweh to faith in Christ Jesus, both associated with a good life in the present and, in Christ, a good life for all eternity. Later in the gospel of John, Jesus cries out at the feast in Jerusalem,

“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’”

Here again the reference is to eternal life, but in the next verse John explains that here it also refers to the receiving of the Holy Spirit:

But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:37–39).

Perhaps the most clarifying statement from the Lord about this is found in Revelation 21:6:

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."

Those last two words set the context: this "water of life" is not obtained by obeying the Law, nor is it obtained by good works, but is given by grace, freely, to those who thirst for it—referring clearly to salvation in Christ, resulting in eternal life with Him.

The pattern set in God's word is that "water of life" or "living water" is a picture of eternal life, flowing from the throne of God, as Walvoord writes,

This future river which is in the new Jerusalem...speaks of the power, purity, and eternal life manifest in the heavenly city. This river corresponds to the present believer's experience of the outflow of the Spirit and eternal life.

And the tree has a similar lineage. The qualities of the "tree of life" in the garden are explained in Genesis 3:22.

Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever."

That is, the tree of life, like the "river of the water of life," is all about *eternal* life—an immortal life with Christ and Father God. It may be that these are literal elements in the new Jerusalem, but in this vision they both serve to represent the unending life in God for those residing there.

Verse 2 states that the tree "bears...fruit every month," but in a city and land that is eternal—not to mention without a sun or moon to mark time—the word "month" is simply an anthropomorphic expression describing the qualities of eternity with familiar terms. The last portion of v2 is very important to those who claim this is describing the Millennium, for what need is there for "healing" in the eternal, perfect state? But they fail to mention that the word translated "healing" by all our version (*therapeia*) can also mean attending to good health; YLT translates it "service." But, again, either interpretation assumes the tree is literally there.

Verse 3 succinctly paraphrases 21:4, that all the evil attendant to living in fallen flesh will not exist in the eternal state. And if one lets one's mind soar, the end of v3 through v5 offers a fascinating picture of the life enjoyed in the eternal state.

*...and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him;*

What will we be doing for all eternity? We will be serving our God and King; all that that will entail, we cannot say. But I can assure you of one thing that it will entail: Worship. Need a definition or picture for that word? Do you wonder what the grammar of worship will be (and *should* be even now)? See Chapters 4 and 5, 15, and the first six verses of 19. That, possibly along with other duties, is what we will be doing with our time. We will not be bored, but will love every minute. As John MacArthur writes, “Life in heaven will be fully energized, rich, and exciting... [His bond-servants] will spend all eternity carrying out the infinite variety of tasks that the limitless mind of God can conceive.”

*they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.*

As the apostle Paul wrote, “...and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:52). Whenever I imagine an eternity with God, as it is described in His word, frankly, my first instinct is to shudder with apprehension. For in a number of ways it describes an existence the polar opposite of that with which I am comfortable now: constant, bright, piercing light, when I prefer dim light; living with lots of people, when I prefer solitude. I will *have* to be changed, otherwise it would mean I would be utterly *miserable* for all eternity.

And one of those changes will be that we will be able to survive seeing the face of God; we will glory in His glory, we will *bathe* in it, and we will glory in the privilege of being named as belonging to Him. We will not be deity, but we will be kin—not just positionally, as now, but physically.

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. (1 John 3:2)

*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.*

Verse 5 reiterates what was stated in 21:23-25. Beyond that, however, if you will permit me, I would like to suggest a possible double meaning in that phrase, “the Lord God will illumine [or “give them light,” or “enlighten”] them.” The Greek *photizo* can refer to either physical light, as from turning on the light in a room, or inner illumination or enlightenment (Ephesians 1:18). I would suggest that both of these meanings can be seen here. The Lord God replaces the sun and the moon with His self-generated glory, rendering artificial light unnecessary. But He also shares with the saints—now “like” Him—some of His own qualities of illumination, understanding.

## AN EPILOGUE

John MacArthur suggests that vv6-21 form an epilogue to the book of Revelation, and that's not a bad way to think of it. By this point the narrative, the timeline of the Eschaton is finished; we have seen all the dynamic changes we are going to see, from the Rapture and the Lamb breaking open the scroll of the seven seals with the ordered destruction they release, to the perfect bliss of the eternal state in the new Jerusalem.

The narrative, from the end of the Church Age, has covered a little more than 1,007 years. We have seen that this present earth will be bruised and battered, and eventually reshaped beyond recognition, before being destroyed utterly; we have seen its people withstand relentless plagues and earthquakes and supernatural phenomena that one would think will drive a sane man to madness; we have seen evil triumph, and evil be completely eradicated; and we have seen our Savior behaving and speaking in ways we never have before.

Now, in this epilogue, Jesus speaks again—not as the reigning King over the eternal state, but once again as the resurrected, heavenly Lord at the right hand of the Father. Here is not the voice of the wrathful judge upon the Great White Throne, but the same voice heard as The Revelation opened:

“Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.” (Revelation 1:17-19)

**Sidebar:** Three times in this epilogue Christ Jesus says, “I am coming quickly.” Each statement includes its unique context, but we should not read any of these as Christ saying, in the first century to John, that he was about, then, to return, as if just days away. The word translated “quickly” (*tachys*) is used here to express His coming swiftly, unexpectedly, not necessarily immediately.

In v6 John records the same angel who showed him the city saying to him, “These words are faithful and true.” That is, *Everything that has been shown to you, told you, and experienced by you has been the truth; it will happen, so put it down for all posterity.* And Jesus Himself, in v7, places the exclamation point after with, “And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.” These words “faithful and true” (elsewhere assigned to Jesus Himself), mean that “what the inspired apostle has written is not mystical; the Apocalypse is not a record of his bizarre dreams or the result of an overactive imagination. It is not an allegory from which readers can extract hidden meanings of their own concoction. It is an accurate description of events and persons yet to come” (MacArthur).

What does it mean for us today to “heed” (or “keep”) “the prophecy of this book”? Once again, we could certainly fill an entire session with the answer to that. Oddly enough, what it does *not* refer to is making a detailed study of it, complete with full-color charts! What it does, however, is that we are

- to not just be ready for the last things, but to *long* for it, to embrace its certainty and the joy that will be ours in it;
- to be inspired by its picture of our reigning King, of His taking His throne, judging and ruling over all; to love Him all the more for it;
- to be reassured by its promise that those who embrace evil will one day pay for their deeds and their rejection of Christ; God is longsuffering, but He does not forget what they have done.
- Not least, the last things narrative should drive us to our knees, to fall down in worship of the majesty and power of our God and our sovereign Lord (v9).

In vv8-9 John repeats the same mistake he made in 19:10—worshipping an angel. I don’t know about you, but I can’t throw stones at the poor guy. I think if I had just been through what he has, I’d be half out of my mind, and bowing down to every sprouting turnip in my path. To say John is overwhelmed, even befuddled—and rightly so—is an understatement in the extreme. But the angel makes an excellent point for us today: “Worship God.” No one else. No *thing* else. Just God alone. Period.

v10: And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.”

Right after the Rapture, one of the first events of the final days is the unsealing of the scroll by the Lamb, Christ Jesus (5:1-6:17). The contents of that scroll had been sealed and hidden until the assigned day of their revelation—hence the name of this book. In v10 of this chapter the angel tells John not to do this with what he has just recorded, but to make it freely available—indeed, to *proclaim* its truth.

And regarding the reception of that truth, the angel goes on to say in v11, “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.”

The prophecies of The Revelation are here for any and all to hear and read. They are not sealed up. We each will be held responsible for how we receive it: If we turn away from or scoff at its truths, then “there is no other message that will work. If the warnings of the book are not sufficient, there is no more that God has to say. The wicked must continue in their wicked way and be judged by the Lord when He comes. There is a sense in which present choices fix character; a time is coming when change will be impossible. Present choices will become permanent in character” (Walvoord).

Jesus Himself presses the message in vv12-13: *Please, please hear me and believe!*

“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.”

As we have seen in this narrative, all judgment has been handed over to the Son by the Father. When Jesus comes He will first determine whether or not one belongs to Him; if so, he or she will be rewarded; if not, there will be no second chance, but the “reward” will be eternal punishment and misery. So to the reader of these words, He still pleads, *I am the One—the first, the last, the Alpha and Omega, beginning and end. I created this world, I will uncreate when the day arrives. Listen to Me! Believe in Me!*

In vv14-15 the apostle offers a marked contrast.

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 do not believe in my lifetime the contrast between the redeemed and the unregenerate has been so stark—and so obvious—as today. I was born smack in the middle of the previous century, and in the 1950s one could walk down the street, or attend a gathering, and there was no obvious difference between Christian and unbeliever; everyone looked pretty much the same, behaved the same, spoke the same. There was, with only the rarest exception, civility and good manners all around.

Not so today. In the 1950s, v15 would have read as some bizarre exaggeration presented for effect, to shock. Today, it is a fairly accurate description of the militant lost and what they stand for, and press upon us at every turn.

### *The Last Invitation*

The final invitation to repentance in God’s word is prefaced by Christ Himself. We have seen verses and passages to which it can be a challenge to assign their speaker—but certainly not v16. First He addresses John, His faithful apostle, then He validates Himself for all.

“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.”

In other words, *I am indeed the prophesied Messiah, the God-man who will reign on the throne of David forever*, as Yahweh told David,

“Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.” (2 Samuel 7:16)

Verse 17 contains the Lamb's final invitation, voiced by the apostle:

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.

And although the warning and validation of vv18-19 are not presented as spoken by Christ, He is the one who testifies to them in v20.

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.

In that last sentence the apostle John speaks for all those who long for the return of our Lord, for we—individually, and collectively, as the church—adore Him. For He is our "beloved."

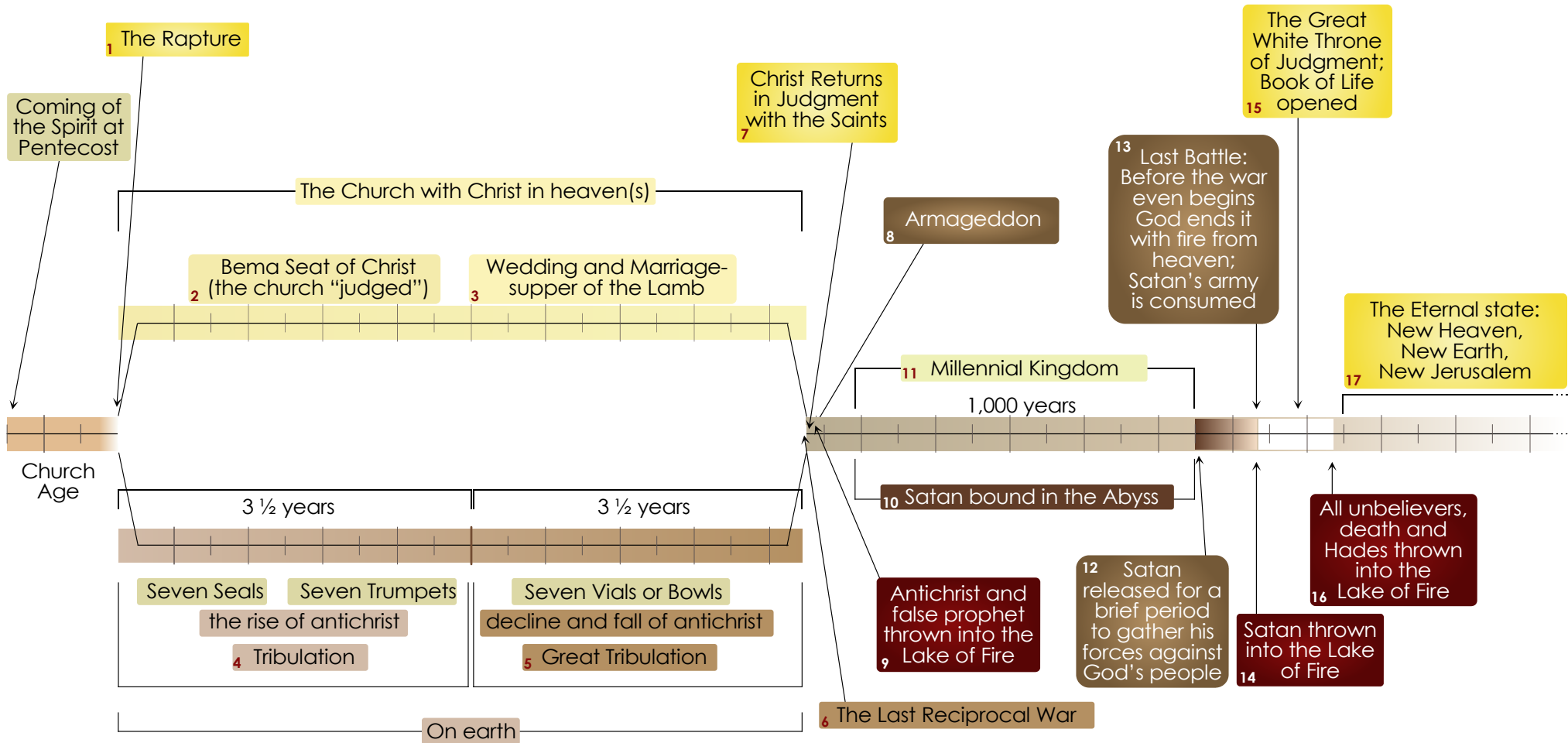
Joseph A. Seiss pictures the church as a young lady waiting for her lover to return—which serves as a suitable postscript to this study.

*Seiss:* Fiction has painted the picture of a maiden whose lover left her for a voyage to the Holy Land, promising on his return to make her his beloved bride. Many told her that she would never see him again. But she believed his word, and evening by evening she went down to the lonely shore, and kindled there a beacon-light in sight of the roaring waves, to hail and welcome the returning ship which was to bring again her betrothed. And by that watch-fire she took her stand each night, praying to the winds to hasten on the sluggish sails, that he who was everything to her might come. Even so that blessed Lord, who has loved us unto death, has gone away to the mysterious Holy Land of heaven, promising on his return to make us his happy and eternal Bride. Some say that he has gone forever, and that here we shall never see him more. But his last word was, "Yea, I come quickly." And on the dark and misty beach sloping out into the eternal sea, each true believer stands by the love-lit fire, looking, and waiting, and praying and hoping for the fulfillment of his work, in nothing gladder than in his pledge and promise, and calling ever from the soul of sacred love, "EVEN SO, COME, LORD JESUS." And some of these nights, while the world is busy with its gay frivolities, and laughing at the maiden on the shore, a form shall rise over the surging waves, as once on Galilee, to vindicate forever all this watching and devotion, and bring to the faithful and constant heart a joy, and glory, and triumph which nevermore shall end.

(J. A. Seiss, *A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ with Revised Text*, Sixth Edition., vol. III, *The Apocalypse* [New York: Charles C. Cook, 1900].)



# LAST THINGS: OVERVIEW



## Footnotes

1  
1 Corinthians 15:20-24  
1 Thessalonians 4:16-17  
Hebrews 9:27-28

2  
Romans 8:1  
Romans 14:10-12  
1 Corinthians 3:9-15  
2 Corinthians 5:10  
2 Timothy 4:7-8

3  
Isaiah 54:5-7  
Ephesians 5:25-27  
Ephesians 5:31-32  
Revelation 19:7-9

6  
Daniel 11:36-45

7  
Revelation 19:11-16

9  
Revelation 19:20  
Revelation 20:10

10  
Revelation 20:1-3

11  
Revelation 20:4-6

12  
Revelation 20:7-9

13  
Revelation 20:9

14  
Revelation 20:10

15  
Revelation 20:11-15  
John 5:21-22  
Acts 10:42

16  
Revelation 20:14-15

17  
Revelation 21-22

4  
Matthew 24:4-14  
Revelation 6:1-17  
Jeremiah 30:4-9  
Daniel 9:27

5  
Matthew 24:15-21  
Revelation 6:1-17  
Daniel 7:23-25  
Daniel 9:27

8  
Revelation 16:13-16  
Revelation 19:17-19

