

The Facebook Commentary on Revelation
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Revelation Chapter 22

Rev 22 (Introduction)— Revelation 22 is the final chapter of the book. It falls into two main parts. The first five verses (Rev 22:1-5) are a continuation of the New Jerusalem vision of 21:9-27. Previously, John was viewing the New Jerusalem as if approaching from a distance. In 22:1-5, he has entered the city (in the vision) and is viewing things from inside. As he continues moving closer and closer to the center of the city, his attention is focused first on the street and river at the center, then on the Tree of Life, and finally then on God and the redeemed in intimate relationship.

The last part of the chapter is what I have called the Epilogue (Rev 22:6-21). The visions of Revelation end with 22:5, but in the Epilogue there is continued dialogue between John, the angel and an unidentified voice. The Epilogue concludes with some final observations from John to the readers of the book. The Epilogue repeats a number of features of the Prologue (Rev 1:1-8), bringing the book of a logical and comfortable conclusion.

Rev 22:1-- And (the angel) showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. The sentence begins with an implied pronoun, “He showed” (Greek: *edeixen*). Translators are divided between “he showed” (KJV, NASB, NKJV, RSV) and “the angel showed” (ESV, NET, NIV, NRSV). Since the pronoun clearly refers back to the measuring angel of 21:15-17, I have reflected the ambiguity by placing “the angel” in parentheses. So, this verse picks up on the narrative of John’s accompanying angel, who was introduced in 21:9, which parallels 17:1. In the Old Testament, several rivers flowed out of the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:10). Water flows from the temple of Ezekiel in 47:1-12 and living waters flow in both directions out of Jerusalem in Zechariah 14:8. Joel 3:18 (Heb and LXX: 4:18) speaks of a future fountain of water that comes out of the temple of the Lord. According to Psalm 105:41 (LXX: Psa 104:41), cf. Psa 46:4 [LXX:Psa 45:5]), the water from the rock struck by Moses flowed through the desert like a river. These predecessors of the waters flowing from the throne in the New Jerusalem, particularly Eden, were likely in John’s mind here. What is described here is “the paradise of God” (Rev 2:7).

In the Garden, the serpent questioned whether God had the best interests of His creatures at heart (Gen 3:4-5). Revelation 22 answers that question with a resounding “Yes”. The garden city of the eschaton is bursting with light, life, and abundance. And all of it is offered to the human race free of charge (Rev 21:6; 22:17). In the last book of the Bible, we come full circle back to the original Garden, showing the fulfillment of the expectations hinted at there (Gen 3:15). Tying these Eden traditions to Jerusalem is quite remarkable, since Jerusalem does not have a river flowing from it, it sits on the top of a ridge. The closest Jerusalem comes to the picture in 22:1 is when, in seasons of unusual rainfall, the Brook Kidron has sufficient flow to trickle all the way down to the Dead Sea. But this is a far cry from the picture in Genesis or here. Since there is no temple in the New Jerusalem, the waters here flow from the throne

instead of from the temple.

There is also a deliberate contrast with Babylon, who sits on many waters (Rev 17:1, 15, cf. Jer 51:13). The waters of the Euphrates River were vital to Babylon's power and success as a worldly power. Babylon represents the pinnacle of human striving. But the New Jerusalem is a gift of God, rather than a reward for human striving. Drinking from the water of life is offered freely (Rev 21:6, 22:17). Aune (*Revelation*, 1136, 1175) translates "the water of life" (Greek: *hudatos zōēs*) as living water, reminiscent of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4:10-11). But in John "living" is an adjectival participle (Greek: *zōn*), in Revelation 22:1 "life" is a noun in genitive form (Greek: *zōēs*). For this reason, I have translated this phrase as the "water of life" rather than "living water", in agreement with all major translations. The main source of water in Old Testament Jerusalem was the Gihon Spring, which was channeled by Hezekiah's tunnel downhill into the city (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chr 32:30), emptying into the Pool of Siloam, which was the site of one of Jesus' major miracles in the Gospel of John (9:6-7, 11).

In the Bible, water can be used in three different ways: 1) as cleansing; often implied with a term for washing (Rev 22:14), in Revelation the medium of washing is blood (Rev 7:14), 2) as threat, as in the flooding water of the dragon (Rev 12:15-16); and 3) as nourishment, as in drinking the water of life (Rev 21:6 and 22:17, cf. John 4:10-14; 7:37-39). In association with the Tree of Life (Rev 22:2), the "water of life" (Greek: *potamon hudatos*) here is nourishing water. The water is "clear as crystal" (Greek: *lampron hōs krustallon*). The crystal may also be a washing symbol, since the sea of glass (Rev 4:6) is like crystal. In the sanctuary context of Revelation 4, the sea of glass may allude to the laver in the Hebrew tabernacle/temple where priests washed their hands and feet before entering the sanctuary. The jasper stone of the New Jerusalem is also like crystal (Rev 21:11).

Up to this point in Revelation, "the One sitting on the throne" and "the Lamb" have been distinguished from each other (although the Lamb is placed "in the middle of the throne" in Rev 7:17), but now there is the singular "throne of God and of the Lamb" (also in Rev 22:3). Jesus is said to have joined the Father on his throne in Revelation 3:21 (cf. Rev 5:6), which may be the source of the current verse, but that position is not made explicit in later descriptions of Revelation until here. Jesus (the Lamb) seems to have been on the throne all along, but that status is especially honored in the New Jerusalem, after the total and final destruction of evil. It may also draw on Psalm 110:1, which was a very popular Old Testament text for writers of the New Testament. There Yahweh invites David's lord (the Messiah) to sit at His right hand until the Messiah's enemies are fully subdued.

Rev 22:2-- In the middle of (the city's) main street, and on each side of the river, was a tree of life bearing twelve fruits, which were produced month by month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. It is unclear whether "in the middle of its main street" (Greek: *en mesō tēs plateias autēs*) belongs with the previous verse or introduces what follows. The absence of a conjunction before the clause and the presence of one afterward ("and" — Greek: *kai*) suggest the verse division should have been after the clause, tying the "in the middle" with the river of life. In that case the river flows down the middle of the main street of the city, forming a boulevard with the river in the middle and the street itself divided on either

side of the river. This is the most popular reading of the passage in modern translations, although Nestle-Aland 27 and USB 3 (critical Greek texts of the NT) end Revelation 22:1 with a period (the earliest manuscripts do not have punctuation, so there is room for interpretation on this point).

In the middle of (the city's) main street. . . . In using the singular for street (Greek: *tēs plateias*) there is the implication that this is the main street of the city, since the city is far too large to have only a single street. The word *plateia* has the same root as the word for broad or wide (Greek: *platus*, cf. Matt 7:13). So this is either the main street of the city or its central square. It appears to be made of gold. See comments on Rev 21:21. The impression is of a river in the center with a park on each side and a boulevard beyond that on both sides. In trying to make sense of the language here it may be helpful to remember that many scenes of Revelation are meant to be heard more than visualized. The images are inspiring but may not always be photographic in clarity.

. . . and on each side of the river, was a tree of life bearing twelve fruits, which were produced month by month. . . . The Tree of Life (Greek: *xulon zōēs*) is also singular, which is strange, since the “tree” is “on each side of the river” (Greek: *enteuthen kai ekeithen*). This pair of Greek adverbs by themselves could be translated “from here” (*enteuthen*) and “from there” (*ekeithen*). Together they are a way of expressing “on either side” (see a similar expression with regard to the two thieves on either side of the cross—John 19:18). The idea of a single tree on both sides of a river has provoked artistic speculations, showing a tree that has trunks on either side of the river with the branches and leaves joining together over the top of the river. The language of bearing twelve fruits month by month is ambiguous in Greek. It is not clear whether the Tree of Life bears a different kind of fruit each month, or twelve fruits at once, with a new crop every month. Either way, it would certainly be unlike any tree we are familiar with today. Perhaps the image is one of abundance rather than variety.

While the word “tree” (Greek: *xulon*) in this verse is singular, a precursor of this account is the multiple fruit trees on the banks of the river which flowed from the temple in Ezekiel 47:12. These trees bear every month, so the parallel is obvious. But in Ezekiel there are many of these trees. So a number of significant scholars have argued that “tree” (Greek: *xulon*) is a collective noun, signifying many trees on both sides of the river. See Aune (*Revelation*, 1177) for both scholarly and biblical references. Like many symbols in Revelation, the language of this verse should not be literally pressed to the ultimate. A strong parallel to this verse, and possibly an allusion, is *1 Enoch* 25:4-6 (cf. 24:4-6), where a beautiful, fragrant tree is given to the righteous and the humble to provide extension of life.

The idea of monthly fruits in the New Jerusalem may also be related to Isaiah 66:22-23, where a restored Israel gathers before Yahweh both weekly (Sabbath) and monthly (new moons). In the ancient Hebrew context, months are not possible without a moon. The moon is not needed for its light (Rev 21:23), but it may still be useful for the measurement of time. This has led some interpreters to suggest that the idea of monthly fruits may be combined with a monthly New Moon festival for the restoration of life and the renewing of relationships. Once a month the citizens of the new earth would need to be fortified with the fruit from the tree and perhaps also its leaves. This would enable eternal life and healing where needed. But since

more than a third of Hebrew years had thirteen months, rather than twelve, it might be wise not to take this too literally. John is using the language of the ancient Israelite worship cycle to describe eternal realities. The future paradise fulfills all the longings of ancient Israelite worship.

Mention of the Tree of Life makes an allusion to the Garden of Eden almost certain. The canon of the Bible ends where it begins, with the Tree of Life. But with that in mind, the absence of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is striking, and commentators have pondered the implications of that. Both trees were in the middle of the Garden of Eden of Eden, but only one of them is mentioned in the middle of the New Jerusalem. One possibility is that the Tree of Knowledge was used by Satan to question the goodness of God and God's creation in the beginning (Gen 2:1-5, cf. Rev 12:9). Its absence in the New Jerusalem would signal the absence of Satan and of any threat to the abundance and joy of the garden city. The New Jerusalem would be God's rebuttal of the charges of self-interest that Satan levied against Him shortly after the creation of earth. On the other hand, the Tree of Knowledge was a symbol of freedom (Gen 2:16-17), so there is nothing inherently evil about it. God honored the freedom of the Tempter by allowing him into the Garden, but limiting him to the one tree. He then acted to protect the first pair from Satan by warning them of his location. On the other hand, the presence of the Tree of Life on both sides of the river could mean that the two trees have become one in the ultimate paradise. Human beings are now trusted with full knowledge of both good and evil. See Tonstad (*Revelation*, 323-328) for an extensive discussion on this topic.

In addition to an allusion to the Genesis story, one of the stronger Old Testament allusions in the whole book of Revelation is the allusion to Ezekiel 47 here. In Ezekiel 47, the prophet sees water gushing out toward the east (direction of the Mount of Olives) from below "the threshold of the temple" (47:1). That water flowed out of the south side of the east gate of the temple complex (47:2). The irony is that the further the prophet goes from the temple, the deeper the waters of the river that was flowing out from the temple (47:3-5), even though the Kidron has no tributaries. As the prophet continues eastward toward the Dead Sea, he observes "very many" trees on both sides of the river (47:7). When the river reaches the Dead Sea, the waters of the sea become fresh and they are filled with birds and fish (47:8-10). The key to the allusion is in verse 12 of Ezekiel 47. The trees on both banks of the river have leaves that do not wither and bear fresh fruit every month. The fruits of the trees are for food and the leaves are for healing. The strength of this allusion is clear, many verbal parallels and a major theme (leaves for healing) that appears nowhere else in the Bible but these two passages. And Ezekiel as a whole is a strong structural parallel to Revelation (see Beate Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel in der Offenbarung des Johannes*, for a detailed comparison of Revelation and Ezekiel). So both the river of life and the leaves of the tree are images of healing in the book of Revelation.

There may also be an allusion to the temple services themselves. The high point of the Feast of Tabernacles was the "rain dance". The priest in charge of the service led a large procession out of the temple and down the hill to the Gihon Spring in the Kidron Valley. As the procession went, they chanted the words of Isaiah 12:3, "With joy you will draw water from the

wells of salvation.” After filling a pitcher of water at the spring, the procession returned to the temple, reciting the fifteen temple Psalms (Psalms 120-134) on the fifteen steps leading into the temple complex. There were two sinks in the floor of the temple courtyard. The water was poured into one of the sinks and a pitcher of wine into the other. The water and wine mixed together when the pipes connected below the temple and flowed down to the Kidron River. If it were a rainy day, the water/wine mixture would flow all the way down to the Dead Sea. This would be the sign of a good rainy season to come, a reflection of the blessings of God.

. . . **and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.** The idea of leaves for healing seems to come from Ezekiel 47:12. But the author of Revelation qualifies that healing as the healing “of the nations”. In 4Ezra 7:123 it is fruit that provides healing rather than leaves. The healing of the nations might be related to the wiping away of tears and healing of hurts during a period of recovery from life on this earth (Rev 21:4; 7:17, cf. 1 Cor 3:13-15). It is likely during the Millennium that both individuals and people groups may need time to heal relational wounds that occurred during the time of probation. If we are known and recognized in eternity (1 Cor 13:12), then life after the Second Coming will involve the resumption of relationships, not all of which will have been pleasant in this life. A Jew who died in a concentration camp may come in contact with a guard who was converted later in life. Israelis and Palestinians will have to find places for each other in their hearts, etc. So, the concept of healing would not be totally foreign in eternity.

Rev 22:3-- And there will be no curse anymore, and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His servants will serve Him. At this point in the vision, there is a shift from a description of the city to a description of its inhabitants. Grammatically, it is possible that “there will be no curse anymore” is the completion of the sentence about the healing of the nations in the previous verse. But more likely this clause begins a new sentence, since there is a shift here from the visionary past of 22:1-2 (“he [the angel] showed me” [Rev 22:1]—Greek: *edeixen moi*) to the future tense. There “will be” (Greek: *estai*) no more curse, the throne “will be” (Greek: *estai*) in it and His servants “will serve” (Greek: *latreusousin*) Him. One possibility is that the visionary description of Revelation 22:1-2 is of the New Jerusalem while it is still descending to the earth, and before the end of evil in 20:9. More likely, this shift moves the standpoint from where John is in the vision (viewing the future city as if he was actually there) to where John is in reality (receiving a vision in the Isle of Patmos). From the latter standpoint, the end of all things is still in the future. There are several points in Revelation 22 where the narrative takes the standpoint of John and the readers (22:6-10, 12, 14, 16-21). Verses 3-5 would seem to be another.

This sentence breaks naturally into three parts. The absence of any curse is noted first, then mention is made of the throne, and the last part of the verse delineates the primary task of God’s people in the New Jerusalem. They will serve God on or before the throne (cf. Rev 3:21; 7:15-17). First of all, there will be no more “curse” (Greek: *katathema*). A curse in this sense is not a swear word, it is the consequences of not living up to a covenant. It is likely John had the curses (Greek root in LXX: *epikataratos*) of Genesis 3:14-24 in mind here, which included banishment from the Tree of Life. The consequences of not trusting God’s instructions

regarding the Tree of Knowledge (Gen 2:16-17) included childbirth pain, thorns and thistles, and separation from God and the Garden. Revelation 22:3 anticipates a time when the consequences of the original sin have been removed from the human race. According to Paul, Christ bore the curse (Greek: *kataras*) of the law in behalf of the human race at the cross (Gal 3:13). So this reversal of the curse is grounded in the death and resurrection of Christ. Since death is the ultimate consequence of sin, it too will be no more (Rev 21:4).

Most commentators see in this verse an allusion to Zechariah 14:11 (RSV): “And it shall be inhabited, for there shall be no more curse; Jerusalem shall dwell in security.” I have highlighted the RSV because most translations translate “curse” (LXX: *anathema*—a cognate of *katathema* in Rev 22:3) with something like “doomed to destruction” (NRSV) or “a decree of utter destruction” (ESV). This is not a bad translation of the meaning of Zechariah 14:11, but it masks the parallel to Revelation 22:3. In Zechariah 14:1-5, the nations attack Jerusalem and seem on the verge of conquering it (14:2) until Yahweh intervenes and fights for His people (14:3). Then Yahweh is established as king over the earth (Zech 14:9), and living waters flow from Jerusalem (Zech 14:8). At that time, the eschatological Jerusalem will be freed from the curse, from all the consequences of its rebellion against God (Zech 14:11). According to Aune (*Revelation*, 1178-1179), “there will never again be” (Zech 14:11 [ESV]—Heb: *lō’ yihyeh ‘ōd*) reflects the covenant language of Genesis 9:11, God’s promise after the Flood. Just as the rainbow promises no more destruction by flood, so in Zechariah, and possibly Revelation 22:3 (cf. Rev 21:1), the curse of war and destruction will be no more.

. . . and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it . . . This repeats the assertion of 22:1 that the throne in the center of the New Jerusalem belongs to both God (presumably the Father) and the Lamb (cf. Rev 3:21). This is one of the many places in Revelation that affirm the full deity of Christ at a very early stage of Christian theological development. Since Jesus Christ is depicted as an emperor (“king of kings”) in 17:14 and 19:16, the rulership of Christ is placed in direct contrast to that of the emperor of Rome. Like Satan, the emperor of Rome used deception and force as tools to keep his subjects in control. The rulership of Christ is very different, grounded in truth and persuasion. To a world tired of tyranny, the Lamb on the throne is grounds for celebration. The powers of Satan have been fully and finally overcome. Note that the occupants of the throne are plural, but in the next clause the pronoun is singular. The throne is of both God and the Lamb, but “His servants” (singular—Greek: *hoi douloi autou*) will serve “Him” (singular—Greek: *autō*). It is ambiguous whether the singular here and in the verse that follows refers to God, the Lamb, or both.

. . . and His servants will serve Him . . . This is the only reference to the inhabitants of the city in the whole vision (21:24-26 refers to those coming in from the outside), and probably includes “the nations” of the earlier passage. The words for “servants” (Greek: *hoi douloi*) and “will serve” (Greek: *latrousousin*) are from different roots in the Greek, unlike the English translations. The word for “servants” (Greek: *hoi douloi*) is from the common Greek word root for slaves and slavery in the ancient world. The slave was duty-bound to his or her master. In the New Testament, the concept of slave to God (Acts 4:29; Rev 1:1; 10:7) or Christ (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; 2 Tim 2:24) was a common way of expressing a settled commitment to the early Christian faith.

The verb for serving in this verse (Greek root: *latreuō*) has the additional implication of cultic service, human beings carrying out religious duties, particularly in the context of temples and sacrifices (Acts 7:7; Heb 8:5; 9:9, 14; 13:10). It is often also used in conjunction with the Greek word for worship (*proskuneō*—Matt 4:10; Luke 1:74; 4:8). There is an extended meaning that includes general service for God (LXX: Deut 6:13; John 16:2; Acts 24:14; 27:23; 2 Tim 1:3) and in the context of idolatry and its avoidance (LXX: Exod 20:5; Deut 6:10-15; Acts 7:42; Rom 1:25). Since the New Jerusalem is modeled on the Most Holy Place of the Hebrew sanctuary, all activity in the New Jerusalem could be understood as priestly service to God (cf. Rev 7:15-17).

Rev 22:4-- They will see His face, and His name will be upon their foreheads. This short sentence falls naturally into two parts. The first part focuses on eternal intimacy with God, the second part on the character of the saved. The future tenses of verse 3 are continued with “they will see” (Greek: *opsontai*). The verb of the second part of the sentence is unwritten, so could be translated either as present (“is”) or as future (“will be”). I and most Bible versions translate as future, echoing the future tense of the first part. This verse as a whole points to a staggering reality. “To look into someone’s face is a demanding form of intimacy. The *face* and the *name* are linked, suggesting that *seeing* and *knowing* are indistinguishable (italics Tonstad’s). What pertains to the outside (face) also applies to the inner reality (name).” Sigve Tonstad, *Revelation*, 332.

They will see His face. . . . There is a rich history in the ancient world regarding the ability to see or not see God. Note the thorough listing of sources in Aune, *Revelation*, 1179-1181. One aspect of the transcendence and greatness of God is the idea that it is difficult or impossible to see Him. Within the biblical context, no one but the pre-existent Christ has ever seen God (John 1:18; 1 Tim 6:16; 1 John 4:12). All of the saved, therefore, will be able to do something that even Moses was denied in the Old Testament. “You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live” (Exod 33:20, NIV, cf. Exod 33:11; Num 12:8; Deut 34:10). Apparently, the problem of separation is not with God, it is with humanity. Before sin, Adam and Eve, like the unfallen angels (Matt 18:10), had no problem being face-to-face with God. After sin, they went to great lengths to hide from God. So this text points to a reality that is not possible in the present, but will become so in the future: “. . . when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. (1 John 3:2, NRSV). The letters of John and the book of Revelation have the same ending point.

When sin has been fully and finally eradicated from the universe, there will be no more walls or curtains between human beings and the Creator, hence no need for a temple (Rev 21:22). You can learn a lot about a person just from looking at them, because character is expressed through the face. So when the text says that the saved will see God's face in the New Jerusalem, it implies that they will know His character, and be in intimate relationship with Him (Psa 17:15). The streets of gold and the perfect eternal health of the saved are not the best part of eternal life. The highlight of Revelation’s picture of eternity is an intimate relationship with the most wonderful of all personalities. They will no longer see God “as in a mirror dimly” (1 Cor 13:12), they will see Him as He is (1 John 3:2, cf. Job 19:26; Matt 5:8).

. . . **His name will be upon their foreheads.** This clause draws a contrast with those who

have the name of the beast written on their foreheads (Rev 13:16-17). Readers of Revelation are given a choice as to whose character will be the model for their decisions in this life. In the Old Testament, the name of God was on the golden plate the High Priest wore on his forehead (Exod 28:36-38; 39:30-31, cf. Zech 14:20-21). This recalls a number of earlier passages in Revelation. The overcomers in Philadelphia are promised that God will write His name on their foreheads (Rev 3:12). In Revelation 14:1, the 144,000 have the name of the Lamb and of His Father written on their foreheads. Those standing on the sea of glass will have overcome the number of the beast's name (Rev 15:2). In this verse the name of God is inscribed directly on the foreheads of God's servants. For the ancients, name was an expression of character. To wear God's name on the forehead would imply that the person's character has some resemblance to God's character. In the New Jerusalem, the character of God will be aligned with the character of His people.

Rev 22:5-- And there will be no more night. They have no more need for the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will shine over them, and they will reign forever and ever. This verse essentially repeats what was stated in Revelation 21:23, but in different words, with one major addition: "They will reign forever and ever". That there is no night there is also stated in 21:25. Aune (*Revelation*, 1181) notes that in 4 Ezra 7:38-42 there is a list of 27 things that will no longer exist in the day of judgment, nine of which are associated with light. In 4 Ezra these are replaced by "the splendor of the glory of the Most High". The Jewish philosopher Philo (in *de Joshua* 24) described the life of heaven as "eternal day" (Greek: *hēmeran aiōnion*), so the sentiments of this verse are rooted in Jewish tradition. In the Old Testament, it is Yahweh who lives and reigns forever and ever (Exod 15:18). God's "forever and ever" reign is announced at the time of the seventh trumpet (Rev 11:15). But in Daniel 7 it is the "saints" that receive the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under all of heaven (Dan 7;18, 27). What Yahweh does in the Hebrew Bible, the "servants of God" (Rev 22:3) are privileged to do in the New Jerusalem, perhaps an echo of Daniel 7. But there is a striking contrast in this text with Revelation 20:4 and 6, where those who have a part in the first resurrection live and reign with Christ for a thousand years.

While in Revelation 21:23 the allusion to Isaiah 60:19-20 is virtually certain, an allusion to Isaiah 60:19 is only probable here. The absence of "the moon" in 22:5 lessens the verbal exactness of the parallel, but may be explainable as the author's avoidance of unnecessary repetition with what is said in 21:23.

. . . **because the Lord God will shine over them.** . . . In Revelation 21:23 it is stated that the "glory of God" (Greek: *hē doxa tou theou*) will "shine" (Greek: *ephōtisen*) on the city. Here it is the Lord God (Greek: *kurios ho theos*) that will "shine" (Greek: *phōtiei*) over them. It is likely that "Lord God" in 22:5 includes the Lamb, since the light-giving quality of God applies to God **and** the Lamb in 21:23. Having said that, 21:23 could also be read "the glory of God has illuminated it, namely (Greek: *kai*), its lamp is the Lamb." In that case, the Lamb would be the primary referent of "God" in both verses (21:23 and 22:5). At a minimum, in either case, Revelation 22:3-5 includes the Lamb in the larger designation of "God". They share in both the throne and the glory of God.

. . . and they will reign forever and ever. The concept of human beings reigning before the throne of God has its roots in Genesis 1:26-28. God created human beings male and female and in God's image. So human beings were created in relationship with God and with each other. In addition, God designed them to have dominion over "over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Gen 1:26, 28). God's design for them was frustrated by the entrance of sin (Gen 3:17-19), but this verse indicates that God's eternal purpose for the human race will be restored in the New Jerusalem. God created a race of beings more like God than any other that He had created, in His image, with the power to create, to choose and to administer. This verse asserts that God will restore that dominion to the human race when sin has finally been dealt with (cf. Heb 2:5-9; Rev 3:21; 7:15-17). With this verse, the visions of the book of Revelation (1:9 to 22:5) come to a close. The book moves from Prologue (Rev 1:1-8) to Visions (Rev 1:9 – 22:5) to Epilogue (Rev 22:6-21).

Rev 22:5 (Excursus on Eternal Life)— In light of the New Jerusalem vision, this seems like a good place to offer a few reflections on what the life of heaven will be like. There are hints in many parts of Scripture, but few commentators have tried to put them all together into a coherent whole. In this excursus I would like to address several questions. What kind of life will God's people have in eternity? Is it really worth waiting for? Would anyone really want to live forever? Will the life of heaven be interesting, will there be challenges to meet and problems to solve, or will it be boring? Would anyone really want to live in heaven? This world has so many exciting things to do that the life of heaven, as popularly understood, seems limited and does not appeal to many people. Many people have a child's view of heaven, it is full of harps, choirs, and gardens, but not much to get the juices flowing. Perhaps it is time we adopted an adult view of heaven. To put the question in a cheekier fashion: Heaven—would a PhD really want to live there?

The Bible offers a number of hints of what the future life will be like. A good starting point might be 1 Corinthians 2:9-10, ESV: "But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him'-- these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God." This passage tells me two things. First, the life of heaven will far transcend anything that the "natural" man can conceive. In other words, human beings, with all their creative talent, can only scratch the surface of what God has in store for us. But, second, those who have the Word of God and are attentive to the Spirit will find that God has revealed many things about eternity, for those who can handle the information (John 16:12).

We can only know about heaven, therefore, to the extent that it is revealed by the Holy Spirit. But in the Scriptures God has revealed many surprising and exciting things about the life of heaven. And this knowledge about the future is not trivial knowledge. Our lives today are strongly influenced by the kind of vision we have of the future. If the life of heaven is attractive to us, it will be an encouragement when things get rough. We will be motivated to prepare for the after-life by appropriate responses today. How we treat people will be affected by our

vision of their status in eternity. So this final excursus matters more than we might expect at first glance.

Would you want to do exactly what you are doing now for an eternity? Or would that get a little boring after a while? One of my teachers in Seminary used to tell this story: A man was fishing by a lake surrounded by mountains. The sun was just coming up when he exclaimed, "This is heaven." Just then an angel appeared and took him to heaven, handing him an amazing fishing pole.

The angel said, "I understand that fishing is your favorite sport."

"Yes."

"Would you like to fish in heaven?"

"Absolutely."

The angel takes him to the best trout stream in all the universe. The man starts pulling in one big one after another. After a year there is a pile of fish behind him ten feet high. At this point the angel re-appears beside him.

The fisherman says to the angel, "This has been great. The best ever. But I was wondering, could we move to a lake or a different stream?"

The angel replies, "This is the best place in the whole universe for fishing and you would be disappointed with anything else."

The fisherman said, "I suppose you're right."

He continued fishing for another nine years until there is a pile of fish behind him 30 feet high. Then the angel re-appeared.

The fisherman responds with a little more vigor this time, "I'd really like to see some other fishing spots."

The angel replied, "This is the best there is. You have the best stream and your favorite hobby. What else could you want?"

The man realizes the angel is right, so he continues sighing for another ninety years. The pile of fish behind him is now a hundred feet high.

The angel re-appears on the hundredth anniversary of the fisherman's arrival in heaven. The fisherman pulls his rod out of the water, slams it to the ground, and says, "I'm sick and tired of fishing! This is not heaven--it's hell!"

The angel smirked wickedly and said, "It took you a hundred years to figure that out!"

Simply living forever is not enough. You might not want to do what you are currently doing forever.

As I have studied the parts of the Bible that address this issue, I have learned that there seem to be three main tasks for the redeemed to perform throughout eternity. The saints in eternity will be kings, priests, and scholars. Let's explore what the Bible says about these three roles and see if they might provide meaning and purpose for the saved throughout the centuries and millennia of eternal life.

The first role of the saved in eternity is summed up in the word "kings". The redeemed in eternity will have incredible power, authority, and responsibility. Let's begin with Luke 19:17 (NIV): "'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'" In the parable, the person is faithful in a

relatively small matter. As a reward for that faithfulness, he is given a great responsibility. In earthly terms that responsibility is described as being placed in charge of ten cities. On earth that would be a huge responsibility, but what might that mean in heavenly terms? Would the heavenly equivalent of ten cities mean being in charge of ten galaxies? Perhaps that vision is way too small. "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne." Rev 3:21 (NIV). This is not an impulsive act on Jesus' part. It is His settled plan to share His rule over the universe with the human race.

A text that is often overlooked regarding the life of heaven is Hebrews 2:5-9 (ESV). "Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere, 'What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet.' Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone." In this text, the human race is closely tied to Jesus. Just as Jesus in His incarnation was made "for a little while" lower than the angels, so the human race was "for a little while" made lower than the angels, but it is destined to transcend the angels in their future role throughout the universe.

To describe Hebrews 2:5-9 In other words, the human race was created to be more like God than any other creature, including the angels. Nowhere are angels ever described as being in the image of God. That phrase is unique to Jesus and to the human race as a whole. Neither is there any evidence that angels have babies. The ability to procreate, to create little people that look and act like us, seems unique to the human race. So the human race was designed from the beginning to be more like God than any other creature. And they were to learn how to rule while multiplying (Gen 1:26-31) in preparation for an ultimate role in the administration of the universe. This plan was derailed for a time by sin. But Hebrews suggests that the plan will be reinstated after sin. In fact, God doubled down on the original plan for the human race by sending Jesus to incorporate humanity into the godhead. Jesus is the ideal human, closer to God than any of the angels. As noted in Revelation 3:21, those who overcome will be granted to sit with Jesus on His throne. This means a significant role for future humanity in the governance of the universe.

The plan of God to elevate the human race to rulership was not an impulsive one, it was in place already with the creation of Adam and Eve. And it is to be implemented after the final judgment (Rev 20:12-13) and the elimination of sin from the universe. Speaking of the great multitude, who have come out of great tribulation and washed their robes (Rev 7:14), Revelation 7:15 (ESV) says: "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence." In this context, the term "serve" has governance implications. In the United States we say that Senators "serve" six-year terms and Congressmen serve two-year terms. The saved "serve" God day and night before the throne, in the governing center of the universe. The language here implies that the saved become members of God's cabinet. They will have roles in eternity that

will make a huge difference and be very meaningful. Perhaps the Joseph story is a model. Joseph was faithful as a slave and then as a prisoner, and, as a result, was elevated to be the prime minister of the greatest nation on earth at the time.

The saved will not find their role as kings on the throne of Christ boring. Administering the universe will be anything but routine. I suspect that God's universe will not be static in eternity. God will continually unveil new plans and goals for the universe that were delayed because of sin, and as His co-rulers, we will be carrying out those plans, organizing, and coordinating them. God's creativity can be seen in the secrets He often hides in stones. When I lived in New York City there was a family friend who collected Franklinite stones. I understand that these are primarily found in New Jersey. If you apply ultraviolet light to a Franklinite stone, it glows in iridescent colors which are not visible to the naked eye under ordinary light. If you picked one up off the ground it would look completely ordinary. But under special light, these stones are truly dazzling. Similarly, geodes are very ordinary looking on the outside, but if you cut a geode in half, you discover beautiful jewels inside. In eternity, God will not only create new things, but will reveal dimensions in things that are already there. To think that heaven will be boring is to imply that God is uncreative. And the redeemed will be in the middle of it all, living lives of incredible power, influence, and meaningfulness.

A second major role of the saved in eternity is symbolized by the roles of priests in the Bible, particularly the Old Testament sanctuary. Human beings will move from being sinners who need a priest to being priests, conducting worship, singing, sharing what we have learned, and drawing people closer to God. Priests were individuals chosen by God to represent Him among other human beings. Through their relationships with people, they made a huge difference in the lives of others. The saved in their priestly role will make a difference in the lives of others throughout eternity.

I have a friend that I don't get to see very often. But when I do see him, we find ourselves talking for days at a time. We could talk for weeks on end without running out of things to talk about. I remember one time we were busy talking in the living room when our wives came to the door, looked into the living room, and said to each other, "Still talking!" The greatest joy in life is found in relationships. In eternity we will take up relationships that we had on earth, but now without the pressure of time or the threat of absence and death. In addition, there will be new relationships to develop with those that we meet up there, like the great saints of the Bible. I think it would be incredibly exciting to meet David or Paul. Imagine the questions you would want to ask them. There will be no threat to such relationships because there is no death, loss, or anyone moving away permanently. In eternity there will be unlimited opportunity to overcome all external emotional barriers and truly get to know each other intimately. With full emotional recovery, there will be no internal barriers to intimacy either.

But the greatest of all imaginable relationships will be relationship with Jesus and His Father. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." John 14:3, NIV. The greatest relationship is with Jesus. Heaven is not the only gift--you also get the Giver. You get to see the face of God and spend time together with Him every month at the foot of the throne. While Jesus Christ is one with the Father, He is also a human being and has a special relationship to the human race. He is a

mediator between God and humanity who communicates what God is like in human form. The priestly role means human beings will also be mediators, sharing what we have learned about God, and also our story of sorrow, suffering, and sin. The future challenge for God is to fashion a universe that is both completely free and completely loyal. For that to happen the evidence of God's goodness and his other-centered love must be overwhelming. Each of the saved will be able to share a unique piece of that evidence. There are many great questions in the universe that can best be answered by those who have had a personal experience with the consequences of sin and rebellion.

Among the questions redeemed sinners will help the universe to answer: If God is good, why was there so much evil and rebellion in the universe? If God is merciful, why did He allowed sin to go on so long? If God has brought an end to sin, how can we be assured that it will never rise up a second time? In their priestly role, human beings will provide assurance that sin will not rise again. The stories redeemed sinners tell will enlighten new creations who do not know the tragedy of sin from personal experience. Satan/sin will have taught human beings unforgettable lessons about both the nature of sin and the love of God that no angel can fully understand. "In the plan of redemption there are heights and depths that eternity itself can never exhaust, marvels into which the angels desire to look. The redeemed only, of all created beings, have in their own experience known the actual conflict with sin; they have wrought with Christ, and, even as angels could not do, have entered into the fellowship of His sufferings; will they have no testimony as to the science of redemption-nothing that will be of worth to unfallen beings?" Ellen G. White, *Education*, 308.

In the coming ages, God will choose to manifest His grace through humanity. "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." Ephesians 2:6-7, NIV. This text asserts that "in the coming ages" God's treatment of humanity will be a lesson book for the universe. Human beings will be channels of grace to the rest of the universe. Under a microscope, every snowflake is unique and different, and no two snowflakes are identical. Would that not be even more true of complex creatures like human beings, made in the image of God? Every human being has the potential to offer a unique witness to some aspect of God's character. God is willing to share His throne with the human race because humanity's priestly mission is so important to Him. It is critical to God in eternity that everyone who has lived through the battle of sin offer a special witness to God's character and to the consequences of sin.

The third major aspect of eternal life is the personal growth that the saved will experience. "Heaven is a school; it's field of study the universe; it's teacher, the Infinite One (Ellen G. White, *Education*, 301). Many people grew up hating school in the traditional sense, but in a larger sense every moment of life is a school. As we saw in our study on the Millennium, the life of heaven will not be static, there will be constant growth and development. If you've ever dreamed of becoming much more than you are right now, the life of eternity will provide unlimited opportunity for that kind of growth. Perhaps a better word than school would be research. To be able to go deep into topics you know little about brings tremendous joy and fulfillment. Research is simply being curious about some aspect of the

world around you. The ability to explore, learn, grow, and discover what is around us, is tremendously enriching and the deeper you go the more enriching it is.

Happiness includes our ability (or capacity) combined with experience. A person with a large capacity to learn and grow, who also has a lot of experience, will find fulfillment. For example, some types of music are immediately appreciated, but after a while you get bored. Classical music is an acquired taste which grows with you as your capacity to understand it grows. The greater the music the less it bores you. In heaven, our joy, capacity, and fulfillment will continue to grow like a taste for classical music. In eternity, the complexity and genius of God's words and action will provide a never-ending opportunity for us to develop our abilities while gaining experiences we could only imagine in in this life. But there's more. Restoration of the image of God will increase our capacity exponentially. "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert." Isaiah 35:5-6, NIV. Our senses, restored as they would have been without sin, will be an immense aid to research, to true science.

Can you think of a time when your senses were dramatically enhanced for a moment and then gone back to normal? Such a momentary high-end capacity is how I envision the normal heavenly reality. I once experienced such a moment of heightened capacity. I was visiting a little church where I had the responsibility of teaching an adult class that met before the main worship service at 11 AM. At 10:15 A.M., a local elder walked up to me and said, "I just learned that our preacher is not going to be here today. Would you preach the sermon?" No one else there had any experience to preach. This was not the first time I had been confronted with such a request, so my mind quickly reviewed various topics I had preached recently, looking to pick one I had not delivered in that church. But the local elder was not finished. He had the audacity to assign me a topic because that that a special emphasis day. I went back to the small pastor's office and prayed, "God, You are going to have to be with me! Please give me the insight to preach a sermon that will be worth the time that the people are about to spend here." An amazing thing happened. My mind was opened to a capacity that I had never experienced before--like being in hyper-drive on a modern-day computer. Contrary to occasions when I had prepared a great deal with minimal results, it was one of the most powerful messages I have ever given. To me, it was a small foretaste of eternal life.

I'd like to think our physical capacities will also be enhanced in eternity. I suspect our eyes will be enhanced to see the microscopic world. At the Museum of Natural History in New York City there was a display some years back where glass representations of minute jellyfish invisible to the natural eye are blown up to about 12 inches across. I was amazed to intricate and colorful designs on fish so tiny that we can't even see them with our eyes today. I similarly expect that our ears will be able to hear things that are inaudible to us today. Dogs, for example, can hear pitches of sound we don't hear. They perk up at approaching sounds long before the humans around them do. In heaven, every power and capability will be increased. And, beyond that, there will be no pain or headache to disturb our study. On top of that, life will be doubled by the fact that we won't need to take time to sleep and rest because of tiredness. We would rest only because we enjoy the rest.

There are small glimpses of this aspect of eternal life in the Psalms. "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." Psalm 16:11, NIV. Ellen White elaborates on this. "The grandest enterprises will be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations will be reached, the highest ambitions realized. And still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of body and mind and soul." Ellen G. White, *Education*, 307. In eternity, we will be granted the privilege of being able to achieve the desires of our heart. "Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart." Psalm 37:3-4, NIV.

If you could do your life over again, what profession would you choose? What kind of life would you pursue? What are the desires of your heart that could only be fulfilled in eternity? Perhaps you would love to be an architect, designing your own living quarters and those of others. The Bible encourages such a dream. Speaking of the future life: "They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands." Isa 65:21-22, ESV. Perhaps you'd prefer to landscape your own botanical garden, gradually developing the perfect environment of maximum beauty. You will be able to do anything you want to your house and land because you will have unlimited time and resources.

If designing houses and landscapes is not your thing, you may want to study biology, zoology, or music. Those who love astronomy will be able to travel throughout the universe and visit galaxies and nebulae, viewing them from all possible angles and getting to know the civilizations that have developed in each one, with all their uniqueness and creativity. Perhaps in another life you might want to be an artist. You will have access to all the great artists among the saved. You can also learn from the Master Artist, the one who shaped and reshaped the universe. Surely God has the capacity to teach art at a level we can't even imagine today. Perhaps your dream occupation would be studying your own personal development and history. You will get acquainted with the angel who was assigned to you to get a first-hand account. You will also be able to research your life history in the heavenly library, or perhaps the heavenly "cloud". While there you might want to check out the true history of this earth and of the universe. The purpose of eternal history will be to avoid making the mistakes of history. All of the above were only hints. "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear." John 16:12, NIV.

Rev 22:6-21 (Introduction)—I call this final section of Revelation the Epilogue, the conclusion of the entire book. The visions of Revelation have now come to an end, and the author sets out his final words for the reader. The term "epilogue" is drawn from classical rhetoric (the art of persuasion), where it labels the conclusion of a speech. The epilogue often reviewed the arguments made in the body of the speech, though the Epilogue of Revelation largely does not do this, except for a series of parallels with the Prologue (Rev 1:1-8). The primary function of the Epilogue of Revelation is to underscore that the content of the book comes directly from God and, therefore, should carry God's authority with the readers of the book (Rev 22:6, 8, 18-

19). It also underscores the nearness of the End (Rev 22:7, 12, 20).

Aune (*Revelation*, 1201-1204) argues that 22:6-9 is not the beginning of the Epilogue, but rather the conclusion of the New Jerusalem vision. He does so on the basis of the strong parallels between Revelation 22:8-9 with 19:9-10. He sees the two texts as the parallel conclusions to the massive number of parallels between 17:1 – 19:10 with 21:9 – 22:9. See comments on Rev 22:8-9 below. I would find that argument more convincing if 22:8-9 came directly after 22:5. But 22:6-7 calls attention to the very opening of the book of Revelation (Rev 1:1-3). There are also a massive number of parallels between Revelation 1:1-8 and 22:6-21 (see Aune, *Revelation*, 1205-1206). So, which of these two parallel structures govern the structure of Revelation 22:6-9? In a sense, 22:6-9 seems to function as a “duodirectional” passage, offering both a conclusion to 21:9-22:5 (22:8-9) and an introduction to the Epilogue of the book (22:6-7). This kind of literary pattern seems part of John’s unique literary style.

The Epilogue contains a series of short speeches by different speakers, interspersed at times by explanations from the author of the book. First, is a comment from John’s accompanying angel (22:6), “These things are faithful and true”. 6b is an explanation from the author. The next speaker is evidently Jesus Himself, speaking in first person, “I am coming soon” (22:7—Greek: *erchomai tachy*). He then offers a blessing on those who keep the words of this book. John then describes his experience and actions in first person (22:8), followed by a response from his accompanying angel (22:9). The angel speaks again in verse 10 and, likely, also in verse 11. The speaker seems to shift to Jesus in 22:12, as he repeats in first person, “I am coming soon” (Greek: *erchomai tachy*). Verses 13-16 seem to continue the speech of Jesus, ending with “I, Jesus” (Greek: *egō Iēsous*) in 22:16. The speaker in 22:17-19 is ambiguous. It could be a continuation of what Jesus said in 12-16 or it could be John’s own testimony regarding the basis of salvation (22:17) and the reliability of the book (22:18-19). Verse 20 repeats the short speech of Jesus, “I am coming soon” (Greek: *erchomai tachy*), along with John’s reply to Jesus. The book ends with the words of John (22:21).

One of the most striking things about the Epilogue is the numerous verbal parallels to the Prologue of the book (Rev 1:1-8—I am indebted to my doctoral chair, Kenneth Strand, for pointing these parallels out in class and in *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 44-45). For example, in the opening verse of the book (Rev 1:1), we are told that the visions of Revelation are given “to show to his servants what must soon take place” (Greek: *deixai tois doulois autou, a dei genesthai en tachei*). That is precisely the Greek wording of Revelation 22:6, the beginning of the Epilogue, “to show to his servants what must soon take place” (Greek: *deixai tois doulois autou a dei genesthai en tachei*). This dramatic and extensive parallel is unmistakable. Revelation 1:3 offers a blessing on those who “keep” (Greek: *tēroutēs*) the words of the book, this is echoed in 22:7 (Greek: *ho terōn*). The Epilogue also has a warning to those who do not keep it by adding or subtracting (Rev 22:18-19).

Revelation 1:3 mentions “the words of this prophecy” (Greek: *tous logous tēs prophēteias*), Revelation 22:7 repeats the same words in the Greek (*tous logous tēs prophēteias*), adding “of this book” (Greek: *tou bibliou toutou*). Revelation 1:3 and 22:10 repeat “the time is near” (Greek: Rev 1:3—*kairos engus*; Rev 22:10—*ho kairos engus estin*). In the Prologue John greets the seven churches of Asia Minor (Rev 1:4, cf. 1:11), the Epilogue (Rev

22:16) affirms that the entire book was addressed to the seven churches. Revelation 1:7-8 refers to the coming of Jesus and mentions Alpha and Omega. These themes are repeated in Revelation 22:12-13. The Prologue climaxes with “I John” (Greek: *egō Iōannēs*) introducing the setting of the book (Rev 1:9-10). The Epilogue does the same (Rev 22:8—Greek: *kagō Iōannēs*). The author intentionally recapitulates the Prologue and its main themes, bringing us full circle back to the beginning. This is a major piece of evidence that led me to structure the book of Revelation as a giant chiasm (pyramid-shaped literary structure).

Rev 22:6-- (The angel) said to me, “These words are faithful and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show to his servants what must soon take place.”

This verse begins the final part of the book of Revelation, the Epilogue (Rev 22:6-21). It functions as a statement of certification that the Prologue (Rev 1:1-8) and all the visions of Revelation are as reliable as Jesus is. After all, Jesus is trustworthy and true (Rev 3:14 and 19:11). So is the book of Revelation (Rev 21:6). The verse opens with the simple sentence “and he says to me” (Greek: *kai legei moi*). The third person “he” is imbedded into the verb “says” (Greek: *legei*). It refers back to the angel who has been accompanying John throughout the New Jerusalem vision (Rev 21:9, cf. 21:10, 15, 17; 22:1), so for the help of the reader I replaced the implied “he” with “the angel” in brackets. This is the first time John’s angel-interpreter speaks. He has been silent up until now. The Greek verb “says” (*legei*) is present tense, depicting the speaking of the angel at the very moment John ceases to be in a visionary state. But normal English narrative would use the past tense here.

These words are faithful and true. In Revelation 3:14 it is Jesus, rather than words that are faithful and true. In Revelation 21:5, it is God that says this clause, here it is John’s accompanying angel that speaks these words (something similar is said by the angel in Revelation 19:9). This declaration, therefore, precedes the New Jerusalem vision and also follows it. According to Aune (*Revelation*, 1182), this statement adopts the style of ancient oath formulas, which would guarantee the accuracy and truthfulness of what was said previously. It is not clear if this statement is intended to apply to the entire book of Revelation or just the New Jerusalem vision that preceded it (Rev 21:9 – 22:5). At first glance, these words are spoken by the angel who is first introduced in 21:9 and would likely have been referring to the things he has shown John (supported by the parallel between 22:6 and 21:5 noted above). On the other hand, if this is the beginning of the Epilogue, as I have concluded, it could well be a statement about the entire book. The strong parallel with 1:1 suggests that the angel of 22:6 is the same as the interpreting angel introduced at the beginning of the book. In that case, this certifying statement would apply to the entire book. It is also possible that the angel in this verse is Christ Himself, as Christ seems to be speaking in first person in verse 7. Jesus offers a similar oath in Mark 13:31, part of a passage (Mark 13:29-33) which is strongly parallel with Revelation 22:10.

The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets. . . . This is a different form of the phrase “spirit of prophecy” in Revelation 19:10. It asserts that behind the writing of Revelation lies the inspiration of the Lord God. God has guided the words of the prophets so that they communicate God’s intentions as well as the human intentions of the writer. What John has

written is both faithful and true (Rev 22:6a). In other words, the content is not only reliable, it is also accurate to God's intentions for the book. The plural of "spirits" (Greek: *pneumatōn*) suggests that this is not a reference to the Holy Spirit, but to the inner workings of prophets' minds. The production of the book of Revelation was a co-operative work between the divine intention and the human intention. This fits the evidence that Revelation is a combination of visionary input and John's own research into the Hebrew Scriptures (whether in a Hebrew or Greek version or even from memory). In the words of Aune (*Revelation*, 1182), ". . . the individual human spirit is the vehicle for the prophetic activity of the Spirit of God" (cf. 1 Cor 14:32). God is called the "Lord of the spirits" frequently in 1 Enoch, and is called "the Father of the spirits" in Hebrews 12:9. In Hebrews, however, the Father of spirits is in contrast to earthly fathers who reproduce only according to the flesh. So "of the spirits" is used differently in Revelation than in Hebrews.

The Lord . . . has sent his angel to show to his servants what must soon take place. The angel being referred to here would seem to be different than the one speaking. The speaker is the angel that has been showing John the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:9-10) and was previously in the book a bowl angel interpreting end-time Babylon to John. As noted in Rev 22:6-21 (Introduction) this clause, "to show to his servants what must soon take place", is an exact parallel to Revelation 1:1. So it is making reference to the interpreting angel of the Prologue, who is sent by Jesus to disclose the contents of Revelation to John (Rev 1:1-3). In the book of Revelation, "servants of God" can refer to Christian believers in general (Rev 1:1; 7:3; 19:5, etc.), but sometimes refers more specifically to prophets (Rev 10:7; 11:18). Aune (*Revelation*, 1183-1184) notes an additional parallel between this clause and Revelation 22:16. There are two major differences. In 22:6 the "Lord God" is the sending agent, in 22:16 the sending agent is Jesus. Both designations reflect Revelation 1:1, where Jesus receives the revelation from God and passes it on to John through His angel. And in 22:6 the servants of God receive the disclosure, while in 22:16 the recipient is John in behalf of "the churches". So servants of God in 22:6 seems to be a general reference to Christian believers rather than a specific reference to prophets (the latter happens in 22:9). On "what must soon take place" see comments on Rev 1:1. Notice a similar clause in Revelation 1:19 and my comments on that.

Rev 22:7-- Behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. An often-repeated theme in Revelation is, "I am coming (Greek: *erchomai*) soon!" (Rev 3:11, 22:7, 12, 20). Revelation does not portray the second coming of Jesus as a distant event from the perspective of John's time and place. Christians in the first century were expected to live in constant expectancy of Jesus' return. Revelation 1:7 contains a present tense, third person version of this statement, "He comes (Greek: *erchetai*) with the clouds".

Because it is in the first person, the "I am coming soon" appears at first glance to be the direct words of Christ. But there is no other indication of a change of speaker here. So many commentators suggest that these are the words of the angel of verse 6, speaking the words of Christ, which He repeats directly in verse 12.

Blessed is the one. . . . In the book of Revelation, there are seven beatitudes: the first of these is "Keep the word of this prophecy" (Rev 1:3). This one is the next to last of the seven and

strongly echoes the first. This particular beatitude functions like an appeal to the reader: "If you believe the words that you have read in this book then keep the words of prophecy."

. . . the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. The key to understanding here is the Greek word translated "the one who keeps" (*ho tērōn*). This exact form is found in two other places in Revelation. In 2:26 "keeping" (Greek: *ho tērōn*) Jesus' works until the end is equated with "overcoming" (Greek: *ho nikōn*). In 16:15 "keeping" (Greek: *ho tērōn*) one's garments is equated with eschatological watchfulness. The root meaning of "keep" (Greek: *tēreō*) is to guard, preserve, observe, pay attention to, or hang on to. "Keeping" here means to pay attention to and observe the prophecies of Revelation. Other forms of the same root can also be found in Revelation. Readers are to "keep" the things written in it (Rev 1:3). The church of Sardis was to "keep" the things they had received and heard (3:3). The Philadelphians "kept" Jesus' admonitions, so He promised to "keep" them "from the hour of trial (3:10, ESV). The remnant and the saints "keep" the commandments of God (12:17; 14:12). 22:9 also speaks of "keeping" the words of this book. The readers of Revelation are to pay close attention to the words of the book of Revelation, cherishing its revelation of Jesus. They are also to exert energy in the direction of carrying those words out in daily life. The revelation of Jesus Christ is to have a transformative effect in everyday experience.

Rev 22:8-9-- I, John, am the one who is hearing and seeing these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he said to me, "See that you don't! I am a fellow servant of you and of your brothers the prophets and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!" This passage recalls and confirms that the book of Revelation was written because John heard and saw the testimony of Jesus (Rev 1:1-2). While John did serious research into his Bible, what we call the Old Testament, the overall direction of the book was delivered from God through an angel to John.

This passage strongly echoes the earlier narrative in Revelation 19:10. In both passages John falls down to worship (Revelation 19:10) an angel, something that any self-respecting Jew would know is inappropriate. And that he would make the same mistake twice is certainly a bit of a puzzle. When we compare the two verses (Rev 19:10 and 22:8-9) side by side, we will discover that the spirit of prophecy (19:10) was the prophetic gift given to John as revealed in this prophecy (22:10).

I, John, am the one who is hearing and seeing these things. In talking about Revelation 7, I brought up the principle that what John heard (Rev 5:5—Lion of Judah, Rev 7:1-4—the number 144,000) sounded very different from what he saw (Rev 5:6—a slain lamb, Rev 7:9—an uncountable multitude), but they were two different designations of the same thing. See comments on Rev 7. Here John puts the two concepts together. The book of Revelation as a whole contains things he both heard and saw. Hearing and seeing are often mentioned together in the Old Testament to express the totality of sense perception (2 Kgs 19:16; Prov 20:12; SoS 2:14; Isa 18:3; Jer 4:21). Of the five senses, these were the two most relevant to the production of this book, they make up the book in its entirety. There is a possible allusion to Jeremiah 23:18: "For who among them has stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear

his word, or who has paid attention to his word and listened?” What seems clear enough is that this statement serves as certification regarding the authorship of the book (cf. Rev 1:1, 4, 9). It came from one who heard and saw the word of the Lord.

And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. The first reference to hearing and seeing is a present participle (*ho akouōn kai blepōn*), speaking of the hearing and seeing as a present reality. But the second iteration, the opening clause of the above, is in the aorist tense (Greek: *ēkousa kai eblepsa*), locating the action that follows after the conclusion of the visions behind the entire book. “When,” (Greek: *hote*) followed by aorist indicatives of “heard” (Greek: *ēkousa*) and “seen” (Greek: *eblepsa*), indicates that the hearing and the seeing are now in the past. Falling down to worship at the feet of the angel is precipitated by John’s visionary experience. Barnes suggests that the seeing mentioned here relates to the pictures, visions, and symbols of Revelation, while the hearing involves the parts of Revelation that came directly in words.

The word “showed” (Greek: *deiknuontos*) is repeatedly used by John’s interpreting angels in Revelation (Rev 1:1; 4:1; 21:9-10; 22:1). It is likely that “these things” (Greek: *tauta*) refers back to the entire book up to this point.

But he said to me, “See that you don’t!” The expression “see that you don’t” (Greek: *hora mē*) is rather strange. It repeats the same expression in 19:10. The ESV translates both instances “you must not do that!” But the Greek is simply a verb for seeing (*hora*) and a negative particle (*mē*). The actual Greek is simply “see . . . not”, with the crucial verb missing. *Hora* is a present active imperative, but it is a command to look, not a command to stop worshiping the angel. So the actual command tied to the “not” is unstated. The force of a negative imperative is to halt an action that has already begun rather than preventing the beginning of an action. John has already bowed down to worship and the angel speaks to reverse that action. Perhaps the most accurate translation would simply be, “Stop! Don’t!” The very abruptness of the angel’s statement shows abhorrence at the very thought of being worshiped (contrast the attitude of Satan in Matthew 4:9). It seems odd that John would make the exact same mistake (bowing down to an angel—Rev 19:10) a second time. But perhaps the statement in verse 7, “I am coming soon”, led John to suspect that the person speaking to him in verse 8 was, in fact, Jesus.

But he said to me, “See that you don’t! I am a fellow servant of you and of your brothers the prophets and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!” This is a nearly exact parallel with Revelation 19:10, with a few exceptions. In the Greek, the first twelve words are identical, “But he said to me, ‘See that you don’t! I am a fellow servant of you and of your brothers. . . .’” (Greek: *kai legei moi, hora mē. Sundoulos sou eimi kai tōn adelphōn sou. . .*). What follows in each case is different, yet clearly related. The conclusion, “worship God!” (Greek: *tō theō proskunēson*) is also identical. This highlights the content in between. Revelation 19:10 follows “your brothers” with “who have the testimony of Jesus” (Greek: *tōn echontōn tēn marturian Iēsou*). John’s brothers are those who have the testimony of Jesus. Revelation 22:9 follows “your brothers” with “the prophets” (Greek: *tōn prophētōn*). John’s brothers are “the prophets”. This correlates with evidence cited earlier (see comments on Rev 12:17 and 19:10) that “the testimony of Jesus” refers to the visionary, prophetic gift that John

had and that the “remnant” of Revelation 12:17 would also possess. The angel could class himself with the prophets in the sense that he also was disclosing revelations regarding the future. It is not clear if Old Testament or New Testament prophets (or both) were in the angel’s mind here.

There is one aspect to 22:9 that we have not accounted for yet. There is an additional phrase in 22:9: “. . . and of those who keep the words of this book” (Greek: *kai tōn tērountōn tous logous tou bibloiou toutou*). Many commentators see this clause as also parallel to “the testimony of Jesus” in 19:10. In that case “the testimony of Jesus” would not necessarily refer to the prophetic gift, but to the Scriptures which all believers possess. But note that this clause is separated from “your brothers the prophets” by “and” (Greek: *kai*). “Those who keep the words of this book” are “fellow servants” along with the angel, John, and his brothers the prophets. In context “those who keep the words of this book” are fellow creatures of the angel, none of whom is worthy of worship. The common element of all four categories (angel, John, prophets and keepers of the words) is creatureliness, in contrast to divinity. So “those who keep the words of this book” are not parallel to “the testimony of Jesus” in 19:10. They are an additional category of creatureliness in 22:9. Understanding the “testimony of Jesus” as the prophetic, visionary gift makes sense of all instances in Revelation (1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10).

Rev 22:10-- And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.” The word for sealing (Greek: *sphragisēs*) can mean different things, depending on the context. In this case it is a verb in the aorist active subjunctive form, which functions as a command to not even start the action of the verb (“don’t even think about it”). There were two reasons to seal a book in the ancient world. One was in order to validate the content of the scroll. For example, a king might stamp his seal on a document to make it official. The other reason to seal a book was to conceal or prevent access to its contents (Isa 29:11, see also Dan 6:17 and Matt 27:66). If the contents were not to be known until the seals were broken, sealing made sure that they remained hidden until the proper time. Sealing here was for the latter purpose. A command to not seal the book meant that its contents were to be readily and immediately available. Unlike Daniel, Revelation was intended to be understood from the first.

And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book. . . . Rather than an allusion to a specific verse in Daniel here, there is an allusion to the more general theme of book-sealing in Daniel (8:26; 12:4, 9). These words in Revelation are in striking contrast with those of Daniel: “But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.” Daniel 12:4 (cf. Dan 12:9-13), NIV. The book of Daniel (or at least parts of it, perhaps Daniel 8-12), is sealed because it is not relevant to Daniel’s time but to the far future. On the other hand, the book of Revelation is NOT sealed, because it was to have immediate relevance to that time with meanings that made sense to those people. When we read Revelation, it is crucial to understand, as far as possible, how it made sense to them. According to this verse, the book of Revelation is a window into God’s mind for everyone who reads it, including the first generation.

There are some further parallels to the concept of sealing a book in John’s background.

In Isaiah 8:16-17, the prophet instructs his disciples to “seal” (Isa 8:16 LXX: *sphagizomenoi*) the prophetic teachings until such a time as the predicted events occur (Isa 8:1-8). In Isaiah 30:8-9 Isaiah is instructed to write things down in a book to preserve them for a time when the people might be willing to listen. In the Jewish apocalyptic book 4 Ezra, the visions are to be sealed to outsiders, but revealed to “the wise” (4 Ezra 12:36-38, cf. 14:5-6, 45-47). Something similar happens in relation to Jesus’ parables in Matthew 13 and parallels. The idea of hiding an apocalyptic book until the end of time is found in a number of extra-biblical apocalyptic sources. See Aune, *Revelation*, 1217. Such strictures were evidently not in place when John was writing his revelation.

. . . **for the time is near.** In the Synoptic apocalypse (Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21), Jesus said that the time of His return is not near (Mark 13:29-33). Certain things would have to happen first, and then the time will be near. So, “the time is near” (Greek: *ho kairos eggus estin*) could be understood as indicating that everything that Jesus promised would happen before the End had taken place, and the time of His return is now near. When the angel says, “the time is near” (Greek: *ho kairos eggus estin*), he is picking up on the language of Jesus in Mark 13:29 and 33. In Mark 13:29 Jesus says that when you see these things (wars, famines, etc.) taking place, you will know that “it is near” (Greek: *eggus estin*), meaning the time of His return. Then, in Mark 13:33 He concludes that His disciples should keep watch because they don’t know when “the time is” (Greek: *ho kairos estin*). Revelation 22:10 combines the two sayings in Mark to declare the nearness of the End. See my comments on Revelation 1:1-3.

Rev 22:11-12-- Let the one who is unrighteous remain unrighteous, let the one who is filthy remain filthy, let the one who is righteous continue to do righteousness, and let the one who is holy remain holy. Behold, I am coming soon! And my reward is with me, to pay back everyone according to his work. Usually in Scripture, calls from Jesus or an angel are calls for change (repent, change your ways). But this is a proclamation that from here on nothing will change. This only makes sense after what we might call the “close of probation”. In other words, the final judgment has already complete, just prior to the second coming of Jesus. So, this proclamation is not directed to the unrighteous, filthy, righteous or holy at that time, it is directed to the reader of Revelation. In the words of Tonstad (*Revelation*, 334), “A deadline . . . is meant to precipitate decisions.” Including this proclamation in the book of Revelation is for the sake of those who will read it. Sandwiched between “It is near” (Rev 22:10) and “I am coming soon!” (22:12), therefore, is the close of human probation. This is not an arbitrary decree on the part of God, it is a point at which everyone on earth has been led by dramatic circumstances to make a firm and final decision for or against the gospel (cf. Rev 10:7; 15:5-8). At this point, continued proclamation of the gospel, as in 14:6-7, will no longer make sense, as people have either committed already or rejected so firmly that they will not be moved, not even by the Holy Spirit. So the call in verse 11 is a call grounded in mercy.

In the context of universal and firm decisions, Jesus announces a reward for each category according to their respective works (in Revelation 20:12-13 judgment is done according to works). This is not some belated form of “works righteousness”. The bestowing of rewards assumes that the judgment is, in some sense, complete. In the New Testament, it is a

regular theme that people are justified according to faith, but they are judged according to works. This suggests that two things happen in the final judgment. 1) The fundamental issue is not what people have done, or how well they did it, but their relationship with Christ. Did they trust in Him for salvation, or did they trust in their own efforts to please God? The issue is not what they did, but what they thought of Christ and His actions in their behalf. 2) The evidence of a faith (trust) commitment to Christ in the judgment, on the other hand, is in the works that were have done in response to that commitment. The judgment assesses the quality of faith by the actions that faith generates in the believer. People can claim to trust Christ and have a relationship with Him, it is their actions that demonstrate the validity of the claim.

Rev 22:11-- Let the one who is unrighteous remain unrighteous, and let the one who is filthy remain filthy, and let the one who is righteous continue to do righteousness, and let the one who is holy remain holy. This statement is placed between a declaration that the end is near (22:10) and an announcement that that Christ is coming soon. It is, therefore, clearly in the context of the very final events of pre-millennial history. The statement is made up of “two synonymous couplets that stand in antithetical relationship to each other” (Aune, *Revelation*, 1217). “Unrighteousness” and “righteousness” are related to “justice”, how we treat one another. “Filthy” and “holy” are more concerned with inward characteristics. Each of the four parts is roughly the same length and there is a poetic quality about the construction. The four parts are linked together into one declaration by three “ands” (Greek: *kai*), as reflected in my translation above. If one takes this as a continuation of the speech in verse 10, the speaker is John’s interpreting angel (Rev 22:10, referring back to 21:9). On the other hand, since Jesus seems to be the speaker in 22:12-13, verse 11 may make more sense as the context for 12-13 than the continuation of verse 10. The transition from John’s accompanying angel to Jesus is not explicit in this passage.

Each of the four “commands” in this verse combines a present participle with an aorist imperative (see detailed comments on the Greek of each of the four statements further below). The Greek imperative can express a command or a request in the second person (“you”). The imperatives in this verse, however, are third person, a form not common in English. These can express a command directed toward a third party (“make him do that”) or permission (“let her do that”). The latter fits best with the context here. The aorist imperative expresses a point in time (the instant of the command), the present participle is extremely continuous. The aorist participle in this case reflects the point in time when probation closes. The present participle expresses that the respective behaviors will continue from that point on. Hence my translation, “Let the one who is . . . remain or continue to do. . . .”

This verse would seem to be evidence against a universalistic reading of Revelation 20-22. There comes a point in human history when behavior is fixed, and change is no longer in view. An old, familiar saying seems apropos here, “Sow an act—reap a habit; sow a habit—reap a character; sow a character—reap a destiny.” Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown express this as follows: “The punishment of sin is sin, the reward of holiness is holiness. Eternal punishment is not so much an arbitrary law, it is a result necessarily following in the very nature of things.” God gives people up so that they can truly “be themselves”.

There is a possible allusion to the Greek translations of Daniel 12:10 in this verse. In the Septuagint (LXX) of Daniel 12:10 the translator says, “sinners will sin” (*hamartōsin hoi hamartōloi*), a similar kind of construction to Revelation 22:11, followed by “and not think things over” (*kai ou me dianoēthōsi*). In other words, the sinning has become natural to them. In Theodotion’s translation of Daniel 12:10 it says, “lawless ones will act lawlessly” (*anomēsōsin anomoi*), similar to the LXX but a different word for sin. This is followed by “and none of the lawless will understand” (*kai ou sunēsousin pantes anomoi*). The likelihood of an allusion to Daniel 12:10 is enhanced by the reference to the sealing theme of Daniel in Revelation 22:10 (cf. Dan 8:26; 12:4). In both passages, Daniel 12:10 and Revelation 22:11, human actions from the past are continued on into the future. The final proclamation of the gospel (in Daniel 12 it is the unsealing of Daniel, cf. Rev 10:5-7; 14:6-7) results in worldwide polarization between those who receive and implement the message (“righteous” and “holy”) and those who align with the beast and his image (“unrighteous” and “filthy”—cf. Rev 14:9-11). See Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 619. Daniel’s view of the end-times is part of the setting for this part of Revelation 22.

Let the one who is unrighteous remain unrighteous. . . . This eight-word English sentence is only four words in the Greek (*ho adikōn adikēsatō eti*). “The one who is unrighteous” (Greek: *ho adikōn*) is a present participle, indicating an ongoing action or reality at the time of the main verb. The main verb (Greek: *adikēsatō*) is an aorist imperative. While we think of the imperative as expressing commands, in Greek it can also express permission. This is supported by the presence of the Greek *eti* (“yet”, “still”) at the end of the clause. Hence, I did not translate “must remain unrighteous” but “let . . . remain unrighteous.” No one is forced to be unrighteous, but the imperative implies a declaration of finality at a particular point in time. From here on, this is the condition that will continue.

These two words for “unrighteousness” build on the Greek word for righteous (*dikaioō, dikaios*—the *dik* stem). The alpha (Greek: *a*) added to the beginning of the word (*adikeō, adikos*) signifies the negation of the word. It means that a person is NOT righteous, does NOT act in a righteous manner. “Let the one who is unrighteous remain unrighteous” expresses the close of human probation for that unrighteous person. In the context of verse 12, this would take place just before the second coming of Jesus.

. . . and let the one who is filthy remain filthy. . . The grammatical construction is the same as the previous clause (Greek: *ho ruparos rupanthētō eti*), a present participle combined with an aorist imperative followed by the Greek *eti*. The difference with the previous clause is the key word in this clause, “filthy” (Greek: *ruparos*). *Ruparos* is a Greek adjective functioning as a noun, “the filthy one”. It is the only occurrence of this word in the New Testament. Related terms are found in 1 Peter 3:21, James 1:21, and James 2:2. Its core meaning as an adjective is “dirty” or “soiled”, as in clothes or a room. But the word frequently has a moral or ethical meaning, behavior that is morally sordid or ritually unclean. Aune translates the term “morally depraved” (*Revelation*, 1217). This is not garden-variety sin, it is ethically repugnant. To be “unrighteous” is to not have good deeds on your record. To be “morally depraved” is to act in defiance of God and of all standards of decency. It is the opposite of “holy”, which appears later in the same verse.

. . . and let the one who is righteous continue to do righteousness . . . The grammatical

construction of this clause has similarities with the two previous ones (Greek: *ho dikaios dikaiosunēn poiēsato eti*), but there are some interesting differences. Instead of the second word from the “righteous” root (Greek: *dikaiosunēn*) being the main verb, a Greek verb for doing is the main verb (Greek: *poiēsato*) in aorist imperative form. “Let the one who is righteous **do** righteousness. The “continue” in my translation brings out the force of the Greek *eti* (“yet”, “still”). The words for “righteous” (Greek: *dikaios, dikaiosunēn*) in this clause are in direct contrast with the unrighteous (Greek: *adikōn, adikēsato*) of the first clause in verse 11.

The word “righteous” (Greek: *dikaios*) can be used in two different ways. The core meaning of the word is “action in harmony with the covenant”. So it can have a meaning related to ethical action. Righteousness by faith, on the other hand, is when someone trusts that the actions in harmony with the covenant done by another (Jesus Christ) can be applied to him or herself. In the former sense this verse would express that people’s obedience is locked in, it has become an innate part of themselves. In the latter sense, the believers’ trust commitment is found to be unwavering and the righteousness they have gained in trusting Christ is assured into the future. The “doing” language (Greek: *poiēsato*) here inclines me to the ethical sense rather than the vicarious sense (one in place of another) in understanding “righteous”. The one who responds to the gospel with action in harmony with God’s will is righteous (Greek: *dikaios*). The one who does not respond to the gospel with ethical action is unrighteous (Greek: *adikōn*). The meaning of the gospel is not at stake in this interpretive decision.

. . . and let the one who is holy remain holy. This last clause returns to the format of the first two: “Let the one who is holy remain holy” (Greek: *ho hagios hagiasthētō eti*). To be holy is to be dedicated or consecrated to the service of God. The text envisions a time when those committed to their service of God will be fixed in that commitment and never fall away. God is merciful and waits long so that as many as possible may be saved (2 Pet 3:9). But when circumstances on earth result in unbending commitments in both directions, God can call a close to the gospel call, as everyone on earth who has failed to accept the gospel is no longer open to doing so.

Rev 22:12— Behold, I am coming soon! And my reward is with me, to pay back everyone according to his work. There is a high likelihood of an allusion to Isaiah 40:10 in the opening clause (ESV): “Behold (LXX: *idou*), the Lord GOD comes (LXX: *erchetai*) with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him (LXX: *ho misthos autou met’ autou*), and his recompense before him.” Revelation 22:12 and Isaiah 40:10 have three major words in common, Jesus in the place of Yahweh, and the pronouns corresponding to the grammatical structure of each verse. Promises made through Isaiah to ancient Jerusalem are here fulfilled in the New Jerusalem of Revelation. Paul (in Galatians 6:7-8) alludes to the same text in Isaiah, as part of everyday moral instruction for Christians. Compare also with Isaiah 62:11.

Behold, I am coming soon! The use of “behold” (Greek: *idou*) is another way in Greek to assert the truth or reliability of what is about to be said. The “I am coming soon” is the second of three occurrences of this declaration in the Epilogue (Rev 22:7, 12, 20). It comes in abruptly here, almost like an editorial insertion. The very abruptness suggests a change of speaker, and

verses 12-16 make the most sense as words of Jesus. The only issue is whether the transition from the interpreting angel to Jesus happens in verse 11 or 12.

And my reward is with me, to pay back everyone according to his work. The concept of reward (Greek: *ho misthos*) has a core meaning of wages, a return on one's investment of time and talent. Within this book, the word recalls Revelation 11:18, where a reward is promised to the saints and all who fear God, both small and great. The idea of paying everyone back according to their works is a fairly common theme in both the Bible and early Jewish writings outside the Bible (Psa 28:4; Prov 24:12; Jer 17:10; Matt 16:27; 2 Cor 11:15; Rev 2:23—see the more extensive listing in Aune, *Revelation*, 1218). The interesting difference is that in most previous iterations “works” (Greek: *ta erga*) is in plural. Here Jesus pays everyone back according to their “work” (Greek: *to ergon*), which is probably to be taken as a collective use referring to the whole body of work. A related idea in Scripture is judgment according to works, which is exercised by God the Father in Romans 2:5-6; 1 Peter 1:17, but by Christ (as here and in 2:23) in 2 Corinthians 5:10. This is not in conflict with salvation by faith, such works are the natural result of salvation and the future state is impacted by the work done in this life (1 Cor 3:10-15; Matt 25:14-30, etc.).

Rev 22:13-- “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Here Jesus claims all the titles and prerogatives bestowed upon God earlier in the book to Himself, a strong affirmation of deity. In Revelation 1:8 it is God the Father that says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega.” The speaker in 1:8 is also “the one who is and who was and who is to come”, language identified with God the Father in Revelation 1:4. In Revelation 1:11 Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega. He is also the “the first and the last”(also Rev 1:17; 2:8; Isa 44:6; 48:12). In Revelation 21:6, God the Father (the one sitting on the throne—Rev 21:5) is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. All three titles, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end, are applied to Jesus in 22:13. It reminds the reader of John 14:9 (ESV), “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” The stacking of these three divine titles one upon the other is a poetic way of heightening the glory of Jesus Christ.

I am the Alpha and the Omega. . . . The verse opens with a simply “I” (Greek: *egō*). The verb is implied, rather than stated: “I . . . the Alpha . . . the First . . . the Beginning.” It is a very emphatic way of equating the speaker with each of these qualities. If one adds the implied “am” (Greek: *eimi*), this recalls Exodus 3:14, where Yahweh identifies as “I AM (LXX: *egō eimi*) that I AM”. “Tell Pharaoh that ‘I AM’ sent you.” The “I am” applies to all three phrases in the verse. As so often in the New Testament, Jesus is identified with the Yahweh of the Old Testament. “Alpha” is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, the equivalent of the English “A”. “Omega” is the last letter of the Greek alphabet. But instead of a “Z” sound, the Omega is pronounced as a long “O”. Aune (*Revelation*, 1219) provides references to similar series of “I am” statements in the Greco-Roman pagan context as well. The words Alpha and Omega open the book (Rev 1:8) and here are part of its close.

. . . the First and the Last. . . . This phrase is used only of Jesus Christ in the book of Revelation (see also 1:17 and 2:8). But it is prominently used in relation to Yahweh in Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12. This is one of many ways that New Testament writers apply Yahweh texts of

the Old Testament to Jesus. This is one of the strongest arguments for the full deity of Jesus Christ in New Testament understanding.

. . . **the Beginning and the End.** This phrase occurs only twice in the book of Revelation. As noted above, the Revelation 21:6 it is applied to God the Father. Here it is applied to Jesus Christ. The phrase implies that God the Father and Jesus Christ are in complete control of history. In the words of Stefanovic (*Revelation*, 620): “History from a biblical perspective has a meaningful beginning because of Christ; and through him it will have a meaningful conclusion.” Jesus is the one who originated the plan of salvation and will bring it to a close. He is the one who created the world and is the one who will conclude its affairs. This can be a source of both comfort (regarding things that have happened in the past) and hope (regarding that which will have to be faced in the future).

All three divine titles in this verse are antithetical. Alpha and Omega are at opposite ends of the Greek alphabet. The First and the Last are at the opposite ends of any numbered list. The Beginning and the End expresses the opposite ends of time and experience. Using these antitheticals in the context of the divine nature expresses that God embodies both extremes and the entire continuum in between at the same time. The comprehensive titles spoken by Jesus tell us that He is included in the prime reality of the universe. If that is true, the one thing that truly matters for human beings is a relationship with Him. This is the ultimate claim of Christian faith. Jesus is much more than a great teacher. He is the ultimate revelation of what God is like and the source of resurrection power and transformation throughout eternity.

Rev 22:14-- Blessed are those who wash their robes, in order that they might have the right to the Tree of Life and might enter into the gates of the city. This is the seventh of seven beatitudes in the book of Revelation. Four of them use the singular of “blessed” (Rev 1:3; 16:15; 20:6; 22:7—Greek: *makarios*). Rev 22:14 is one of three that use the plural of “blessed” (Rev 14:13; 19:9; 22:14—Greek: *makarioi*). The plural is also used in the well-known beatitudes of Jesus (Matt 5:3-12; Luke 6:20-23). To be “blessed” is to be fortunate or happy on account of one’s circumstances. The word group has a core meaning of material wealth and comfortable circumstances. But, more commonly in the New Testament, it has the extended meaning of divine favor and positive spiritual circumstances.

In the first beatitude (Rev 1:3), the blessing rests on those who understand the book of Revelation and “keep” (Greek: *tērountes*) the things that are written in it. Here the condition for receiving the blessing depends on which manuscript tradition reflects the original intention of the book’s author, John (see below). The blessing itself, in this case, is to have rights to the Tree of Life and entrance into the New Jerusalem. As is often the case in the Epilogue of Revelation (Rev 22:6-21), this verse serves as an appeal to the reader to respond in a way that will result in the stated blessing. This verse speaks of those who have the right to enter the New Jerusalem. The next verse (Rev 22:15) speaks of those who will be excluded from it. On the possible universalistic reading of this verse see Rev 21:24-26—Excursus on the Identity of the Nations in Revelation).

The Greek text behind the King James Version reads “Blessed are they who do His

commandments.” Most modern translations reflect a Greek text that reads “Blessed are those who wash their robes.” How can one explain such a wide difference in the manuscripts of Revelation? Clearly there is a textual problem, a scribal error of some sort. But how could a scribe divert from a source text so widely? Instead of the original Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, we only have copies of copies of copies--hundreds of them for every verse in the New Testament. More than 60% of the verses in the New Testament have at least one significant variant within the manuscript tradition. So verses with no textual difficulties are the exception rather than the rule within the New Testament. Copying manuscripts is a tedious and difficult task, and many times little errors creep in that are mostly unintentional but are sometimes even intentional (usually in order to “correct” a variant that seems wrong to the copyist).

How did such a radical difference among the manuscripts of Revelation 22:14 occur? There were two primary methods for copying manuscripts in ancient times. One was for a copyist to work from a written predecessor manuscript, copying it word by word (or sentence by sentence if he/she was in a hurry). But a faster way to produce manuscripts was to have a room full of copyists, copying from a text read to them from the front. The first method produces errors of the eye, where a tired eye skips over, misreads, or duplicates what is written in the original. The second method produces errors of the ear, where two different words can sound the same, so an incorrect word may be copied instead of the correct one, because they sound the same. Another factor in manuscript errors is the fact that the earliest manuscripts did not have spaces between the letters (paper was scarce and expensive). As a result, the exact same letters could be divided into different words by changing the spacing, as in “Godisnowhere”. That can be read as “God is now here” or “God is nowhere”, two very different word sets.

The English of the KJV reads “do His commandments” (Greek: *hoi poiountes tas entolas autou*). On the other hand, the English of the ESV is “wash their robes” (Greek: *hoi plunontes tas stolas autōn*). In terms of quantity, the two readings are relatively equal. The earliest manuscripts were written in all caps, without spaces between the letters. Whether the copyist was reading or listening, it would be easy for a scribe to turn one into the other. These two phrases not only look similar in Greek (especially in the ALL CAPS format), they would sound similar when spoken. Either way an error is easily possible.

While the difference between these two readings is large in the English, it is very small in the Greek. While the majority of later and less reliable Greek manuscripts read “do His commandments”, the earlier and better manuscripts generally read “wash their robes”. In further support of this judgment, in the two places in Revelation where commandments are unquestionably present, believers “keep” (Greek: *tērountōn, tērountes*) His commandments, they don’t “do” (Greek: *poiountes*) them (which would imply a kind of legalism). This is supported by evidence from 1 John, where “keep His commandments” (e.g. 1 John 3:22—Greek: *ho teron tas entolas autou*, cf. 1 John 2:3-4; 3:24; 5:3) is the norm. But in 1 John 5:2 you will find the reading “do His commandments” (Greek: *tas entolas autou poiōmen*). So, the argument from grammar in favor of “wash their robes” falls short of certainty. The use of “keep” (from the Greek word *tereō*) in Revelation 22:14, however, would be natural, if that

were John's intention, since forms of the word "keep" are used in three earlier beatitudes (Rev 1:3; 16:15; 22:7).

If the reading "wash their robes" is correct, it would highlight the centrality of Christ's redemptive work and the forgiveness and cleansing available to believers. The point of emphasis would be that salvation is obtained through faith in Christ. On the other hand, if the reading "do His commandments" is correct, the text would be emphasizing obedience to God's commandments, highlighting the ethical dimensions of the Christian faith. The fruit of salvation is a life characterized by obedience to God's will. We are saved by faith alone, but saving faith is never alone. Although a different word for robe is used in 19:8 (Greek: *bussinon*), a clean garment is defined there as the "righteous actions" (Greek: *dikaiōmata*) of the saints. So, a reference to the commandments here would not be totally out of character for Revelation.

In summary, textual scholarship leans toward "wash their robes" as the original reading of Revelation 22:14. Those who emphasize the obedience that flows from salvation might regret the loss of the "do His commandments" reading. But in Revelation, this text is not necessary in order to make that point. Keeping the commandments is a critical feature of God's end-time remnant/saints in the final crisis of earth's history (Rev 12:17; 14:12). Throughout Revelation, however, the author refers to "keeping" God's instructions (Rev 22:9), keeping the words of the book (Rev 1:3), rather than "doing" them. It would be unusual for the author to say, "Blessed are they who DO his commandments". So, the weight of manuscript evidence seems to be on the side of "washing robes" (cf. Rev 7:14, and possibly Rev 1:5) as the original reading of this verse. The actions of the saints are not the grounds for their entrance to the city, but the results of what Christ has done for them. Washing their robes appropriates the righteousness of Christ in their behalf.

Blessed are those who wash their robes. . . . If "wash their robes" is the correct reading, there is a close parallel with Revelation 2:7. There it is the "one who overcomes" who will have access to the Tree of Life. Here it is those who wash their robes that have access to the Tree of Life. So "overcoming" and "washing robes" define each other in Revelation. Since both concepts are in present tense, they do not refer primarily to baptism but to ongoing faithfulness to Christ. A parallel in reverse is found in Revelation 3:4. Christians in Sardis have "not defiled their garments", meaning that they have continued their moral and spiritual faithfulness. The Israelites were required to wash their garments before the appearance of God on Mount Sinai. The Levites were required to wash their clothes and bodies before being dedicated to their ministry in the wilderness tabernacle. So the washing of robes implies both the beginning of the walk with God and its continuation through ongoing faithfulness. So there is little difference in meaning between the two different readings of 22:14.

Robes are garments worn on the outside, but in a figurative sense they represent the moral and spiritual character of the one wearing the robe (see Rev 19:8). A dirty robe represents deficiencies in character, a clean robe represents cleansing from sin (Zech 3:1-5). The clean robe allows access into the heavenly courts (Zech 3:7). A dirty robe would deny such access. Access into the New Jerusalem, therefore, requires the washing of robes, a metaphor that has already found a place earlier in Revelation (Rev 7:13-17). Washing in the blood of the

Lamb is symbolic of everything Christian faith has to say about acceptance with God and the transformation that results (see comments on Rev 22:14 above).

. . . **in order that they might have the right to the Tree of Life.** . . . Access to the Tree of Life is expressed with the Greek word for “authority” (*exousia*). In fact, the expression in Greek is actually “authority over” (*exousia epi*) the Tree of Life. This reminds the perceptive Greek reader of God’s “authority over” (Greek: *exousian epi*) the seven last plagues (Rev 16:9). Authority has the implication of “legally correct” or “authorized” as much as “power”. Those who wash their robes do not have “power over” the Tree of Life, they have the right to it and the freedom to exercise that right. It is not an issue of ability, it is a matter of permission. Those who have been conferred a title to eternal life have permission to eat from the source of that life. This clause is likely an allusion to the narrative of Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the Garden in Genesis 3:22-24. Concern is expressed in Genesis about rebellious sinners having access to “forever life”. Revelation 22:14 declares that the ban had been lifted for those who wash their robes.

. . . **and might enter into the gates of the city.** The order of the last two clauses in this verse is a bit strange at first glance. Logically, one must enter the gates of the city before approaching the Tree of Life, since the Tree of Life is in the center of the New Jerusalem. But Aune (*Revelation*, 1222) notes a figure of speech in Greek which he calls “last-first”. In this expression two events are placed in reverse order. This happens quite frequently in the book of Revelation (Rev 3:3, 17; 5:5; 6:4; 10:4, 9; 20:4-5, 12-13).

Tonstad (*Revelation*, 335) notes echoes of the Good Shepherd narrative in John 10:1-9 here. Entering the sheepfold by the door demonstrates both legitimacy and good intentions. The shepherd and the sheep enter the sheepfold by the door. Thieves and robbers climb in over the wall, but not with good intentions. They come to steal and kill and destroy (John 10:10). In the book of Revelation, the destroyer is Apollyon and Abaddon, other names for Satan (Rev 9:11, cf. 12:9). But while one can encroach on a sheepfold by climbing the fieldstone walls, the New Jerusalem has no other entry points but the gates.

Rev 22:15-- Outside (the city) are dogs, sorcerers, the sexually immoral, murderers, idolaters and everyone who loves and practices lying. This is the third of three exclusion texts in the New Jerusalem portion of Revelation (see Rev 21:8, 27). For a general analysis of the three exclusion texts see Rev 21:8 (Excursus on Exclusion from the New Jerusalem). “Vice lists” like these three are common in the New Testament and many other ancient sources. While unfamiliar to us, the book of Revelation is treading ground that would be familiar to readers in that time and place. There are especially close parallels between Revelation 21:8 and 22:15. In addition to the theme of lying, which is common to all three exclusion texts, both lists include murderers (Greek: *phoneusin, phoneis*), sorcerers (Greek: *pharmakois, pharmakoi*), idolaters (Greek: *eidōlolatras, eidōlolatrai*), and fornicators (Greek: *pornois, pornoi*). In contrast to the earlier exclusion texts, the first five items in this vice list have the article in the Greek, which expresses categories more than groups of individuals, so I have mostly left these untranslated (“the dogs and the sorcerers, etc.”—Greek: *hoi kunes kai hoi pharmakoi*).

Outside (the city) are dogs. . . . The one category in this verse which is unique among

the exclusion texts in Revelation is that of dogs (Greek: *hoi kunes*). Roaming packs of dogs, unattached to humans, scavengers, hungry, dirty, and wild, were common outside cities in the ancient world. Dogs such as these were objects of dislike (2 Kings 9:10, 36; Psa 22:16, 20; Jer 15:3). But humans back then also domesticated dogs as pets (cf. Matt 15:26-27; Mark 7:27-28). For those who appreciate dogs as pets, the exclusion of dogs from the New Jerusalem might make future citizenship in the city less attractive. But since this is the only reference to an animal in any vice list of the New Testament, it must be taken in a metaphorical sense here. In the ancient world, dogs were usually a symbol of negative human behavior.

The term “dog” implies defective character or low social status, it is, therefore, applied in the Old Testament as an insult (1 Sam 17:43; 24:14; 2 Kings 8:13; Isa 56:10-11). It is also a term used by Jews to refer to Gentiles (Mark 7:25-28; Matt 15:22-27), and by Christians to refer to the unbaptized (*Didache* 9:5) and heretics (Phil 3:2; 2 Pet 2:1, 2, 22). The term was also used for male prostitutes in pagan temple services (Deut 23:17-18). Temple prostitution, whether gay or straight, was vigorously condemned in the Old Testament (Deut 23:17-18; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 2 Kings 23:7; Isa 57:3-9; Ezek 16:23-26; Hos 4:10-19; Amos 2:7; 3:12). Perhaps the “dogs” in Revelation 22:15 are the equivalent of those who commit abominations in Rev 21:8 and 21:27. It is in that metaphorical sense that “dogs” are excluded from the New Jerusalem. The exclusion texts of Revelation 21 and 22 remind the reader of 20:7-9, when hostile humanity gathered outside the beloved city in an attempt to conquer it. In both cases, the situation is a temporary one.

Rev 22:16-- I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you for the churches. I am both the root and the descendant of David, the bright and morning star. As we have seen within the Epilogue (Rev 22:6-21) so far, the work of Jesus and His angel is so intertwined that it is often difficult to tell which of the two is speaking. But here the two are clearly distinguished. Jesus is, without a doubt, the speaker in this verse. The opening sentence recalls the language with which the book of Revelation opened (Rev 1:1-4). As in the opening passage of the book of Revelation, Jesus Christ is the source of the visions of Revelation, his angel is the messenger, the message itself is the testimony, and the churches are the recipients (Tonstad, *Revelation*, 337).

In a sense, the first clause of 22:16 acts as a summary of the entire book of Revelation. Interpreters have often made a strong distinction between the messages to the churches in Revelation 1-3 and the visionary portions of the book (Revelation 4-22). But this verse clearly states that the entire book, including the visionary portions, were originally intended as a testimony for the seven churches of Asia Minor (Revelation 2-3). This means that the interpretation of the visions of Revelation (such as the seals, trumpets, and bowls) should be consistent with the content of the messages to the seven churches.

. . . to testify to you for the churches. There is an interesting exegetical issue in this clause. Jesus sent His angel to testify “to you” (Greek plural: *humin*) “concerning the churches” (Greek: *epi tais ekklesiais*). The big question here is, who is the “you” in this clause? Charles, Swete and Mounce, among others, suggest the “you” are the members of the seven churches. In that way of reading, the “you” and the “churches” would be the same thing. But that does

read awkwardly in Greek. If John was writing directly to the churches, it would have been easier to leave out the “to you”. Then the angel would testify to, or concerning, the churches. David Aune (*Revelation*, 1225), along with Lohmeyer and Schüssler Fiorenza, prefers to think of the “you” as John’s fellow prophets (cf. Rev 22:9, also 1:3; 19:10), who would be expected to pass the messages on to the churches. I would suggest the most likely answer is the “angels” (probably pastors or overseers) of the seven churches (Rev 1:20). They are the first recipients of the book and the ones responsible for its public reading in the churches.

I am both the root and the descendant of David. . . . This is one of five full “I am” (Greek: *egō eimi*) sayings in Revelation (cf. Rev 1:8, 17; 2:23; 21:6). God says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega” in 1:8 and 21:6. Jesus says, “I am the first and the last” in 1:17. Jesus is also the one who searches hearts in 2:23. The use of I am with a predicate is a common self-reference of Yahweh in the Old Testament prophets. This sentence, however, particularly echoes the language of Revelation 5:5 where the Lion of Judah is “the root of David” (Greek: *hē riza Dauid*). 22:16 adds to the root (Greek: *hē riza*) “the descendant of David” (Greek: *to genos Dauid*). As Creator, Christ is both the ancestor and the descendant of David. As David’s ancestor, He is the author of the revelations in this book (Rev 1:1), the one who reveals what God is like. As the descendant of David, He is a king and is worthy to sit on God’s throne (Rev 3:21; 5:5-6).

Combining the root and offspring of David in this self-designation of Jesus likely reflects Jesus’ divine and human natures. As God, He is the ancestor of David, the One who formed him. In His humanity, Jesus is also the descendant of David. In the first sense, He is the source of David, in the latter sense, David is the source of Jesus. Jesus is David’s Lord as well as David’s son (cf. Matt 22:42-45; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44).

Reference to the root of David is a possible allusion to Isaiah 11:1, 10, which forecasts a wise king (a branch from Jesse’s roots) who would accomplish all that was promised to David (2 Sam 7:12-16; Psa 89:3-4, 34-36; Isa 9:7; Jer 23:5-6; 33:14-16, cf. Rev 17:14; 19:16).

As an interesting side note, when Erasmus (early in the Reformation period) was developing his Greek text of the New Testament (the basis for the translations that would follow), he was able to secure only one manuscript of Revelation. That manuscript broke off after the word David in 22:16. So he was forced to create the rest of the Greek text (Rev 22:16b -22:21) by translating back into Greek from the Latin of the Vulgate. Many more manuscripts of Revelation are available today, so today’s translations are usually based on the most likely readings from a vast amount of evidence.

. . . the bright and morning star. The overcomers in the church at Thyatira are promised the morning star (Greek: *ton asterā ton prōinon*). The morning star is here applied to Jesus (Greek: *ho astēr . . . ho prōinos*), with the addition of the adjective “bright” (Greek: *ho lampros*). In Revelation 15:6, this word is applied to the garments of the seven angels who hold the seven bowls in the heavenly temple. In 19:8 it is applied to the garments of the saints and in 22:1 it is applied to the appearance of the water of the river of life. It can mean radiant and even transparent. Babylon was once bright and shining, but in 18:14 has lost its luster. Aune (*Revelation*, 1227) notes that in Greek the “morning star” is called *phōsphoros* or “light-bearer”, while the Latin equivalent is *lucifer*. See comments on a possible allusion to Isaiah 14:12 below.

Some commentators see this star as an allusion to Numbers 24:17, where Balaam

foresees a star that will come out of Jacob. This is possible, but the evidence is fairly minimal. There is only one major word in common between the two passages, the word “star” (LXX of Num 24:17: *astron*, Greek of Rev 22:16: *astēr*). So this is not technically a verbal parallel. Since Jews in John’s day read Numbers 24:17 as messianic, John’s readers may well have made a connection to Jesus. Within the passage in Numbers, the poetic parallel to “star” is the “scepter” that will arise out of Israel (Israel was Jacob’s new, divinely-assigned name—Gen 32:28). There gives a royal undertone in both passages (“scepter” in Num 24:17 and the mention of David in Revelation 22:16). This allusion seems less likely to be intentional than the one to Isaiah 11 earlier in the verse.

Tonstad (*Revelation*, 337), on the other hand, sees in “the bright and morning star” an allusion to Isaiah 14:12, ESV: “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!” If that is so, John is not likely working from the LXX (Greek translation of the Hebrew OT). For “morning star” the Greek of Isaiah 14:12 has *eōsphoros*, the Greek of Revelation 22:16 has *ho astēr . . . ho prōinos*, very different ways of saying that. To “morning star” in Isaiah 14:12 is added “the one who rises early” (LXX: *ho prōi anatellōn*), Revelation 22:16 adds “the bright one” (Greek: *ho lampros*). There is a single verbal parallel between an adverb (LXX: *prōi*) and an adjective (Greek of Rev 22:16: *prōinos*). Thematically, the concepts of morning star and bright and shining are found in both places, but the wording is different. The chance of an intentional allusion rises somewhat if John was working from the Hebrew, which has “morning star” (*hēllēl*) “son of dawn (*ben-shāhar*). But the word parallels fall well short of certainty. If we grant an allusion here, it would assert Jesus’ full and final victory over His demonic adversary. He claims right to the title that Lucifer had claimed as his own.

Jesus as the morning star may reflect an important New Testament theme. Just as the morning star is the signal that a new day is at hand, so Jesus’ resurrection was the “first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20). It is His resurrection that guarantees the resurrection of believers at the end of history (1 Cor 15:23). It is also the “power of His resurrection” that energizes believers in the present (Phil 3:10). So “morning star” is a metaphor of the great significance of Jesus’ resurrection for all who follow Him.

Rev 22:17-- The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let everyone who hears say, “Come.” And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let everyone who wishes take the water of life without cost. The verse as a whole reads as a response to Jesus’ assertion in verse 12 that He is coming soon. It is made up of four short sentences that are related closely to each other. The first is a statement of the fact that the Spirit and the Bride invite all to respond to Jesus’ assertion in verse 12. The other three sentences elaborate on three different classes of people invited to respond. The response is spoken by the Spirit and the church and it invites every reader of Revelation to be an agent of further invitations to respond. The invitations in this verse are verbs in the imperative. So, these are general exhortations appropriate to every reader of the book throughout its history. The message of the book of Revelation calls people to take the water of life. The promise of the New Jerusalem calls people to take the water of life. But in this verse the Holy Spirit and the church join in the call. As strange as it can be at times, Revelation

is a New Testament book in service of the gospel of Jesus Christ. To everyone it says, "Come to Jesus. Drink the free gift of the water of life." This verse invites all who hear it to call others to accept the free gift of life.

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." "The Spirit" (Greek: *to pneuma*) is a singular voice speaking on earth in behalf of heaven. The "Bride" (Greek: *hē numphē*) is a collective voice, representing the narrative of the New Jerusalem, while appeals to readers to consider the future reward in their decision-making in the present. See below. It is a joint invitation to readers to respond to Jesus's assertion that He is coming soon (Rev 22:12). The Spirit speaking recalls what the Spirit "says" (Greek: *legei*) toward the conclusion of each of the messages to the seven churches (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22), which were alluded to in the previous verse (22:16). The author of those statements is Jesus Himself, so the Spirit is closely connected to Jesus throughout the book of Revelation. Elsewhere in Revelation, the Spirit is often symbolically described as "the seven spirits which are before His throne" (Rev 1:4, cf. 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). But here the Holy Spirit is mentioned in straightforward language.

In my translation, the "Bride" is capitalized as the personification of either the people of God (19:7-8—Greek *hē gunē*) or of the New Jerusalem (21:2, 9—Greek: *numphēn, tēn numphēn*). So there are two possible referents for "Bride" (Greek: *hē numphē*) in 22:17. One would be as a reference to the people of God, the church. But this is not likely here as it would seem to be covered in the clause that follows: "And let everyone who hears say, 'Come'". And the word for "bride" is different in 19:7-8 than in 22:17. So the more likely reference in 22:17 is to the New Jerusalem. In 21:2 "bride" (Greek: *numphēn*) is a figure of speech describing the appearance of the New Jerusalem. In 21:9 "bride" (Greek: *tēn numphēn*) is a metaphor of the New Jerusalem itself. The narrative of the New Jerusalem is itself an appeal to the reader to take the water of life, in order to be designated a citizen of the future city. Since the New Jerusalem now contains the people of God, the two meanings of "Bride" are, in fact, closely related. See comments on Rev 21:9. The church as the bride echoes Paul's metaphor in Ephesians 5:25-32).

The word "say" (Greek: *legousin*) is a third person plural verb referring back to both the Spirit and the Bride as a compound subject. The term is a statement of fact, this is what the Spirit and the Bride are saying.

And let everyone who hears say, "Come." "Everyone who hears" (Greek: *ho akouon*) is set in contrast with the Bride. My sense is that this refers to readers who may be hearing the story of the cosmic Christ for the first time. They are called to give voice to their new-found faith in Jesus and in His soon return. In contrast with the previous clause the word "say" is third person singular imperative (Greek: *eipatō*). The imperative does not express a statement of fact, instead this is an invitation to those who hear the words of the Spirit and the Bride to spread the invitation to others. Revelation 1:3 refers to "those who hear" (Greek: *hoi akouontes*), here "everyone who hears" (Greek: *eipatō*) is in mind, but the appeal is directly to all individuals within the group of those who hear. The implication of both 1:3 and 22:17 is that the hearing will take place in the context of a public reading of Revelation, so the appeal here should be understood as direct and personal in the context of worship.

What is not so clear is whether the appeal to "come" (Greek: *erchou*) is directed to Jesus

(who promised to come in 22:12) or to the reader, as in “come to Jesus”. The context of 22:12-16 and also verse 20 suggest the former, in that case, a collective prayer for the soon coming of Jesus is the goal of the appeal. But the context of 22:17c and d suggests the latter, in which case, the appeal of 17b is to come to Jesus and receive the water of life. In its immediate context, it makes more sense to see the “come” here connected with 22:12-16 and 22:17a. The more marginal members of the churches are invited to join in with the Spirit and the core members in prayer for the soon return of Jesus.

Having said this, the imperative middle singular of “come” (Greek: *erchou*) appears seven times in the book of Revelation (Rev 6:1, 3, 5, 7; 22:17 [2x], 20—Ken Mayberry alerted me to this fact in a Facebook post on September 26, 2023). In 22:20 the imperative of “come” is directed toward Jesus. In 22:17 (2x) it is not clear if the “come” is a gospel appeal to the unsaved or an appeal to Jesus to hasten His return. But in the four horsemen passage (Rev 6:1-8), the word “come” (Greek: *erchou*) is directed toward the riders on each of the four horsemen. I have taken the position that the four horsemen depict the going forth of the gospel which results in our varying reactions. If that is so it would increase the likelihood that *erchou* in 22:17 is a gospel appeal to the unsaved. I have not made a definitive commitment to either interpretation. Either one is compatible with the larger picture of the book.

And let everyone who is thirsty come. Although the word “come” appears for the third time in this verse, its meaning and direction are different from the previous two. The appeal to “come” is no longer directed to Jesus (“come soon”), the appeal is directly to the thirsty, and the coming is their coming to Jesus and to the church. So this third part of the verse is tied to the fourth part, which is explanatory of the third part. In the fourth part the word “come” is replaced with taking “the water of life.” The appeal of parts three and four is directed to all readers who have not yet understood the full implications of connecting with Jesus and need to make an initial commitment to Jesus and to the church. It is reading the book that has created the thirst which can only be satisfied in relationship with Jesus. Before He comes to us at His return, we are called to come to Him. It is when we come to Him that we will learn to “love His appearing” (2 Tim 4:8, KJV).

Hunger and thirst in John’s day were often used as metaphors for the spiritual desires only God can fulfill (Psa 42:2; 63:1; Amos 8:11; Matt 5:6; John 4:14-15; 7:37; 1 Cor 10:4). For similar references in Early Judaism see Aune, *Revelation*, 1229. Along with Revelation 21:6, “let everyone who is thirsty come” (Greek: *ho dipsōn erchesthō*) is a probable allusion to Isaiah 55:1 (ESV): “Come, everyone who thirsts (LXX: *hoi dipsōntes poreuesthe eph’ hudōr*), come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!” There are two main words in parallel along with synonyms for coming, and there are no strong options to Isaiah 55:1 for the source of this wording. But the allusion works better in the Hebrew than the LXX. Both Revelation 22:17 and the Hebrew of Isaiah 55:1 contain three imperatives for “come” (Heb: *leki* from *halak*). In the words of Aune (*Revelation*, 1228), this parallel combines “the three motifs of an address to the *thirsty*, an invitation to *come*, and the mention of *water*” (italics original). The word translated “without cost” (Greek: *dōrean*) is the equivalent of “without money and without price” in Isaiah 55:1 (ESV).

Let everyone who wishes take the water of life without cost. The “water of life” (cf.

Rev 21:6; 22:1) is a metaphor for salvation, as is the fruit of the Tree of Life. The human need for salvation is expressed in terms of thirst. Salvation meets an essential human need that should be desired as much as human beings desire water in a dry, desert environment. It is those who sense their need for salvation that are drawn to it. "Without cost" translates the Greek word *dōrean*. It can mean a gift, something that comes without cost, something that cannot be paid for (Matt 10:8; Rom 3:24). The word implies that the person receiving the gift has done nothing to deserve it (John 15:25), it is truly given without conditions. While the gospel invites human response, that response is never the grounds of a person's salvation, salvation is grounded in the prior decision and actions of God.

The "water of life" (Greek: *hudōr zōēs*) here recalls the river of the water of life in 22:1. While that river is a future reality, this verse brings that future reality into the present. As is the case in most of the New Testament, the first coming of Jesus inaugurated the new, heavenly age in which the blessings of heaven begin to be felt on earth, even in the midst of the abundant evidences that the old, earthly age is still everywhere present. There is a now and there is a not yet. The book of Revelation emphasizes the not yet, but is very much grounded in the now as well. The appeal to take the water of life is certainly appropriate, not just at the close of the book of Revelation, but at the close of the biblical canon. The grace of God is free, and it is available to all.

Rev 22:18-19-- I bear witness to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone should add (words) to it, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book, and if anyone should take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part in the Tree of Life and in the holy city, the things which are written in this book. This is a fitting ending to Revelation, and in its canonical location is a fitting ending to the entire Bible. While there is a strong tendency in today's world not to take the Bible as a revelation from God, and thus to blunt the force of a statement like this, it seems clear that John did not have such a modern attitude toward the sacred writings. To him they were the Word of God, special messages from heaven that transcend the knowledge and ability of any human being other than Christ Himself. More than that, as noted by Stefanovic (*Revelation*, 621), Revelation was designed to meet the need of the "thirsty" (Rev 22:17), so tampering with the book would have life and death consequences. It is sobering to see these words at the end of my years-long project to produce a verse-by-verse commentary on this book. I hope that readers both here and above will find my humble efforts to understand this book reasonably faithful to its divine intention.

The immediate context of this passage is the free gift of 22:17. The salvation offered in Revelation is free, but the current passage makes it clear that the free gift is not forced on anyone, it comes with a choice. Like the horse brought to the water trough, the reader who is not thirsty will not be coerced to drink, salvation can be refused. One can add to the gift by adding requirements that must be accomplished before the "gift" can be offered. One can take away from the gift by dimming the clarity of the offer, or by hiding it from all who need it. So that readers will not miss the point, the grace (Greek: *charis*) of the Lord Jesus is brought out in other words at the very conclusion of the book (Rev 22:21).

This passage (Rev 22:18-19) divides neatly into three parts. The passage opens with a solemn oath delivered to everyone who hears (or reads) the words of the book of Revelation. This is followed by a pair of conditional sentences that state the opposite conditions. The first condition is directed toward anyone who would add (Greek: *epithēsei*) anything to the book. The second condition is directed toward anyone who would take away (Greek: *aphelē*) anything from the book. In other words, the book of Revelation, just as it is, grammatical flaws and all, is just the way God intended it to be. Both expanding on it or seeking to diminish it will have serious consequences. Adding to the book will result in the plagues being added to the one who does that. Taking away from the book, will result in the loss of the Tree of Life and access to the New Jerusalem. The same is true of the Bible as a whole. It is precisely the way God intended it to be, challenging stories and all. The safest course for those seeking to do God's will today is to consider what it says about God as a whole (Mal 4:4-6).

An allusion to Deuteronomy 4:2 (ESV) is probable here: "You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you." The reference in Deuteronomy is to the Torah (five books of Moses) in general and Deuteronomy in particular. Adding or taking away from the message will undermine the purpose of Deuteronomy; obedience to the commands of Yahweh, the God of Israel. One cannot obey what one does not know about. In the case of both Deuteronomy and Revelation, the danger is no longer changing the actual words of the respective texts, it is misinterpreting or misapplying them. It is possible that John may have also had Deuteronomy 12:32 (LXX—ESV, Heb-- Deut 13:1) in mind: "Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it."

At a minimum, there is also a strong thematic parallel between this passage and 1 Enoch 104:10-12: "And now, I know this mystery that the words of rectitude will be changed, and many sinners will rebel, and will speak wicked words, and will lie and make great works, and write books concerning their words. But when they write all my words in rectitude in their languages, and do not change or abridge anything of my words, but write all in rectitude, all that I have first testified on their account, then I know another mystery, that books will be given to the just and to the wise for joy and for rectitude and for much wisdom" (translation by George H. Schodde). The author of Enoch expected his book to provide joy and wisdom to the righteous, but feared it would be altered afterward by others.

In the immediate sense, the warning in Revelation seems to be for the copyists who may be tempted to adjust or smooth out the book's wording. In the canonical sense, however, it would refer to selective readings that do not do justice to the divine intention for the Scriptures.

I bear witness to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. . . . The "I bear witness" (Greek: *marturō egō*) suggests an ancient oath formula intended to verify the reliability of the material being presented. Similar oath formulas occur earlier in Revelation. In 19:9c (ESV) an angel says to John, "These are the true words of God". In 21:5 (ESV) the one sitting on the throne says, "These words are trustworthy and true" (cf. Rev 22:6). In 10:6 the mighty angel swears by the one who lives forever and ever. Oath formulas are found frequently in the Old Testament. One of these is "Yahweh has sworn" (Amos 4:2; 6:8; 8:7, cf. Gen 22:16;

Psa 89:3; 110:4; Isa 14:24; Jer 44:26; Mic 7:20, etc.). Another oath formula in the OT is introduced by “As I live, says Yahweh” (Isa 49:18; Jer 22:24; 46:18; Ezek 5:11; 14:16, 18, 20; Zeph 2:9). Similar formulas are found in Jewish apocalyptic and prophetic speeches outside the biblical canon (see Aune, *Revelation*, 1229-1230).

As with 22:17, it is not absolutely clear who the speaker is in 22:18-19. Is it Jesus, in line with 22:12-16, or is it John himself? The “I” here is emphatic, adding the pronoun *egō* to “testify”. In 22:16 the verse begins with “I, Jesus” (Greek: *egō Iēsous*). That would suggest Jesus is the speaker here. On the other hand, the emphatic use of “I” fits with an oath formula, where John certifies the validity of his own words. The language here is somewhat reminiscent of Revelation 1:1-3. In 1:3 a blessing is pronounced on all who hear and act on the words of Revelation. Here a curse is passed on all who add or take away from it. The testimony of John is in harmony with the testimony of Jesus (Rev 1:2). The answer to the question whether the book is the revelation of John or the revelation of Jesus is left unspoken. The book is a product of both human and divine action.

I bear witness. . . . The solution to the speaker in this verse may lie with how oath formulas are used in the ancient world. In his commentary on Revelation (page 1230), David Aune notes that in the Old Testament, prophetic oaths are always spoken by Yahweh, never by the prophet. By way of contrast, in Jewish apocalyptic and Greco-Roman prophecy, oath formulas were always used by the prophet and never by the deity. If that pattern is continued in Revelation, the speaker in verse 18 would certainly be Jesus Christ. This is likely confirmed in verse 20, which picks up on the witness language of verse 18 by stating, “The one who testifies (Greek: *ho marturōn*) these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” The speaker of 18a is the same as the speaker in 20a, the one who is coming soon, namely Jesus.

. . . the words of the prophecy of this book. . . . This is a Hebraic way of writing. The Hebrew language is very limited when it comes to adjectives, so it uses nouns in the construct state (where nouns are strung together similar to the Greek genitive) to take the place of adjectives. This kind of Hebraism is found fairly frequently in the New Testament (Matt 19:28—“son of man”, “the twelve tribes of Israel”; Rom 6:6—“the body of sin”; Rom 7:24—“the body of this death”; Phil 3:21—“the body of the lowliness of us”, “the body of the glory of Him”; Rev 22:7, 10—“the words of the prophecy of this book”). While John never claims the status of a prophet, the fact that his book is a prophecy, and his “brothers” are prophets (22:9), indicates that John understood himself to have the gift of prophecy.

If anyone should add (words) to it . . . if anyone should take away from the words. . . . As noted earlier, the two conditional sentences are parallel to each other as opposites. The protases of the two conditional sentence each have a conditional particle, “if” (Greek: *ean*) followed by a verb in aorist subjunctive form. The first conditional sentence states the condition as “if anyone should ‘add’” (Greek: *epithē*). The Greek word *epithēmi* has the meaning of simple addition, but it has an extended meaning of inflict or attack. So the addition in this case implies some hostile intent. The second conditional sentence states the condition as, “if anyone should ‘take away’” (Greek: *aphelē*). Likewise, the Greek word *aphaireō* means more than simple subtraction, there is the implication of robbery or inappropriate removal. So in both conditional sentences, there is the implication of tampering with the text. No innocent mistake

is implied here. John is worried that some will be tempted to tamper with text. Evidence from Jewish apocalyptic confirms his fears. In these clauses the adding and taking away are to be taken as literal in relation to the words and ideas of Revelation. The adding and taking away in the apodoses is more figurative, having to do with eternal life.

. . . God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book . . . God will take away his part in the Tree of Life and in the holy city, the things which are written in this book. The apodoses of both conditional sentences are also parallel as opposites. God is the subject of both. As with the protases, the two main verbs are the same opposites, “add” (Greek: *epithēsei*) and “take away” (Greek: *aphelei*). The meanings of the main verbs are, of course, the same as described above. Elsewhere in the New Testament, as in Luke 12:9, conditional curses tend to use divine passives in the apodosis. Here, on the other hand, God is the subject of active verbs. According to Aune (*Revelation*, 1231), in the Greco-Roman world condition curses rarely mention gods as guarantors, but in Asia Minor the practice was different. So the formulation in 22:18-19 is consistent with its geographic location. The “plagues” (Greek: *tas plēgas*) mentioned here refer most likely to the seven last plagues summarized in Revelation 15:1 and outlined in 16:1-21. Loss of the Tree of Life (Rev 22:2) and the holy city (Rev 21:9-27) is a corresponding consequence by omission. It is interesting that the Tree of Life refers back to the beginning and the holy city refers to the end. So, according to Bengel, these two rewards encompass the first and the last, the beginning and the end (cf. Rev 22:13).

Rev 21:20-21-- The one who testifies these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come Lord Jesus. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with everyone. This passage contains four brief sentences. The first repeats Jesus’ promise to come soon, but it is introduced in third person. The second sentence is one simple word of affirmation, Amen. The third sentence fleshes out the “amen” with John’s response to Jesus’ promise to come soon, “Come Lord Jesus” (Greek: *erchou kurie Iēsou*). This is an imperative (“Come”) followed by two vocatives (“Lord Jesus”). The last sentence is John’s conclusion to the book, that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ would be experienced by all who read the book.

In these concluding verses of Revelation, the language of “coming” becomes the language of response. In the midst of Revelation’s accounts of plagues, judgments, and the lake of fire, grace is still available to everyone who reads the book. That grace is particularly available to those who long for His coming.

The one who testifies these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon. Amen.” The declaration that Jesus is coming soon is in response to the invitations of the Spirit, the Bride, and those who hear in verse 17. When the book of Revelation comes to its conclusion, there is no message from John or from an angel mediator. Jesus speaks directly to the readers of Revelation here. The word “testifies” (Greek: *ho marturōn*) echoes previous mentions in verses 16 and 18. In Revelation 20:16 Jesus sends His angel to testify about “these things” (presumably verses 14 and 15) for the benefit of the churches. In 22:18 the speaker, probably Jesus, pronounces the conditional curses on those who might tamper with the book. The one who testifies here is probably Jesus (cf. Rev 1:5—“the faithful witness [Greek: *martus*]”), as only He can truly declare, “I am coming soon”.

“Yes” (Greek: *nai*) is a positive word that could be translated “yes indeed!” “Yes” (Greek: *nai*) and “amen” (Greek: *amēn*) often function as a word pair to certify the truthfulness of what has just been said or is about to be said (cf. Rev 1:7; 2 Cor 1:20). In this case the “I am coming soon” is sandwiched between the two words. As is the case here, *nai* is more likely to precede a statement and *amēn* is more likely to follow. It would be appropriate for the *amēn* to be spoken by Jesus, but it is equally possible that the *amēn* is inserted by John, in response to Jesus’ statement.

“I am coming (Greek: *erchomai*)” is a futuristic use of the present tense (cf. Rev 2:16; 3:11; 16:15; 22:12; 17—sometimes called a prophetic present tense, cf. also Rev 1:7; 7:14; 11:14). Prophetic presents in Revelation normally refer to the Second Coming of Jesus, but not always (Rev 2:5, 16). One could rightly translate, “I will come soon”, but that would mask the underlying Greek construction.

The word “soon” (Greek: *tachu*) is attached to “coming” (Greek: *erchomai*) six times in Revelation. The first three relate to events in the near future of the seven churches (Rev 2:5, 16; 3:11) and the latter three refer to the Parousia (Rev 22:7, 12, 20). In all six cases, the phrase is spoken by Jesus. The word *tachu* is combined with “comes” (Greek: *erchetai*) in 11:14 to refer to events that lie ahead. A related form (*tachei*) is used in Revelation 1:1 and 22:6 to refer to the whole eschatological schema of the book, including the Parousia. According to Aune (*Revelation*, 1233-1234), ancient Greek magical texts often command deities to come quickly, here the deity Himself promises a speedy coming! John seems to be suggesting that the God of Revelation cannot be controlled by human actions, such as magical incantations.

If Jesus speaks here with full knowledge of the future, one could question the use of “soon” (cf. Rev 1:1), it could even seem like a deception. “Soon” here should not be read in terms of absolute chronology, but as expressing Jesus’ eagerness to return, and His willingness to do so as soon as all the events described in the book have been completed (cf. comments on this by Tonstad, *Revelation*, 341).

Come Lord Jesus. This short sentence is in response to the “I am coming soon” in the first sentence of the verse. One could think of this sentence as a prayer for fulfillment of the promise to come soon. The most challenging part of this is that imperatives are rarely used in prayers in the New Testament or in earliest Christian literature, and where they are used they are normally in the aorist tense rather than the present tense (see Aune, *Revelation*, 1234). An aorist imperative appeals to someone to begin an action, the present imperative asks another to continue an action that is already in progress. The best explanation is that, in Greek outside the Bible, present imperatives are used in situations of severe emotional distress. The delay in the Parousia has stressed John and his followers and he closes this book with a fervent plea for the fulfillment of the promise.

“Come Lord Jesus” is a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic phrase *marana tha* (“Our Lord, come!”). Early Christians seem to have adopted this Aramaic expression as part of their longing for Jesus to return. Paul uses the phrase toward the conclusion of His first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 16:22). The fact that it is also used in the early Christian catechism *Didache* suggests that this usage was fairly widespread among the followers of Jesus (*Did* 10:6). The verse in the *Didache* is quite similar to the conclusion of Revelation: “Let grace come, and let

this world pass away. Hosanna to the Son of David. If any one is holy let him come (to the Eucharist); if any one is not, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen.” The phrase “Lord Jesus” occurs only twice in the book of Revelation, here and in the following verse. “Lord Jesus” is also associated with *marana tha* in I Corinthians 16:22-23.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with everyone. This deeply symbolic book ends with plain everyday prose. The “everyone” (Greek: *pantōn*) here could be understood as a wish that the grace of Christ would be present in everyone’s life, including those who reject Jesus. More likely this wish is directed to all who read the book of Revelation and “keep” the things written in it (Rev 1:3; 22:9). The differences among the Bible versions of this verse are due to the fact that the ending of Revelation has at least five major variations, so there was some kind of problem in the transmission of this text. The earlier (usually considered better as well) manuscripts go with the shortest version, which I have followed in my translation above. The Byzantine manuscript tradition (later and generally considered less reliable) closes with “all the saints” (Greek: *pantōn tōn hagiōn*), affirming the more exclusive reading of “everyone” (Greek: *pantōn*). Fortunately, no significant belief is threatened by these particular differences. The word “grace” (Greek: *hē charis*) occurs in Revelation only here and in 1:4. It is typically used in the New Testament in relation to Christian letter-writing. It suggests that the entire book is to be understood in part as a letter from John to the seven churches of Asia (cf. Rev 22:16).

A listing by Aune (*Revelation*, 1240) shows that the final sentence of the book is crafted in the form of an epistolary conclusion (the ending of a letter). This sentence in Revelation most closely resembles the conclusions of Paul’s letters (Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 13:14; Gal 6:18; Phil 4:23; 1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess 3:18; Phile 25, cf. 1 *Clement* 65:2). Shorter versions, leaving out “of our Lord Jesus Christ”, include Colossians 4:18, 1 Timothy 6:21, 2 Timothy 4:22, Titus 3:15, and Hebrews 13:25. Such conclusions normally have three parts, the mention of grace, a statement of who is bestowing that grace, and a statement of who is on the receiving end of that grace. And so this amazing book comes to an end with a typical epistolary conclusion.

The last word from heaven in the book of Revelation is “Yes indeed, I am coming soon.” The last word from John is an offer of grace to all who long for Jesus’ appearing.

Rev 22:6-21 (Conclusion)—As we have seen, the Epilogue is rightly so called because it matches the Prologue (Rev 1:1-8) in its essential contents, drawing the book to a satisfying conclusion. On the other hand, the Epilogue is a puzzling mixture of different speakers that seems almost randomly joined together. From verse to verse, readers struggle to know who is speaking and when the speakers transition from one to another. Unlike Daniel (Dan 8:26; 12:4, 9), John is forbidden to seal the book (Rev 22:10, cf. 1:3), so its contents are intended to be accessible to all readers from the first. In this book, John is communicating a prophetic message (Rev 22:8-9) to the churches of Asia Minor (Rev 22:16). Reaction to the message is critical to the dual outcomes outlined in the vision (Rev 22:14-15). These outcomes will be exposed at the time when Jesus returns (Rev 22:11-12). In his response (“Come Lord Jesus”) John models the response he desired all readers and hearers of the book to make (Rev 22:20).

In writing the Epilogue, it almost seems as if John anticipated that his book would put

the finishing touches on the sacred canon of Scripture. Revelation recalls the stories and teachings that run from Genesis through the histories and the prophets to the Gospels and the letters. Revelation is the end of the plan/story of salvation, from Eden lost to Eden restored. It is the finale of the biblical symphony. It is the place where “all the books of the Bible meet and end” (Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 585). But in another sense, the end of the biblical canon is also a beginning. The biblical story continues in the lives of the book’s readers, who receive in it “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rev 22:21). The cosmic conflict continues in the lives of all who will be impacted by John’s visions. And while believers here catch a glimpse of their heavenly home, the darker sides of Revelation remind readers that they are not home yet. The end has not yet come. There are robes to be washed (Rev 22:14). Those who are filthy can still find cleansing. Those who are unrighteous can still be found righteous (Rev 22:11). The water of life remains on offer (Rev 22:17). The rest of the story is still to be written.

Rev 22:6-21 (Spiritual Lessons)—The book of Revelation’s vision of the future looks forward to a time when there will be no more curse, no more tragic outcomes, no more evil consequences, or the actions that produce them. In this life, we face the results of a lot of things that we have done. Most of us live with many regrets. But a time is coming when all that is wiped away and we get to make a new start in a new earth. Even if we remember the mistakes of the past, those memories will not hurt anymore, and they will provide the foundation of an eternal testimony to the power of redemption and to the character of a God who never gave up on us. For the universe to be both free and safe, such testimonies will be an eternal necessity and will do much good, even in a perfect universe.

The very best part of the life of heaven will not be the streets of gold or the ability to travel the universe and see amazing sights for eternity. The very best part of heaven will be to see the face of God. That will be the ultimate relationship. True fulfillment is found in relationships where another knows all there is to know about you and loves you anyway without conditions. And there is a special thrill in meeting a genuine celebrity! With God you will have all that, and on top of that, the knowledge that he will never die and will never leave you. The best of relationships are secure for all eternity.

I don't tell many of my friends everything there is to know about me because I'm afraid if I did they might not like me anymore. But with God there is no need to be afraid. God loves us without conditions and is always available. In the person of Jesus, we have some idea of what meeting His Father and the Holy Spirit will be like. There will be nothing like meeting the members of the Godhead, knowing that we have an eternity to bask in God’s life-giving glory. A glimpse of what that must feel like can be sensed from Revelation 5:9-14. Knowing God will be so great that it will provoke endless praise.

Rev 21-22 (Excursus on Preparation for the Future Life)-- A few concluding thoughts on how readers of Revelation can use the information on the life of heaven as part of their preparation for the future life. Are there things people can do now that will make a difference then? How do we live in today’s world with this vision of the future? One of the most inspiring figures in my teen-age years was the choral conductor, Jon Robertson, who later became a famous

European conductor and pianist. Thanks to him, I got to sing in Lincoln Center's Philharmonic Hall (home of the well-known New York Philharmonic Orchestra) at the age of sixteen. Robertson was always tickled when people said to him, "When I get to heaven, I am going to play the piano the way you do." He would always reply, "Nope, you won't. When we get there, I'll be at least twenty years ahead of you." He spoke in that way out of the conviction that the abilities he had cultivated in this life would remain with him in eternity.

According to inspiration, people are rewarded in eternity according to the effort--not the talent--that they put out on earth. Salvation is by faith alone, but saving faith is never alone. The efforts people make in response to salvation matter, not just now, but also in eternity. Notice Luke 19:26, NIV: "He [Jesus] replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.'" This statement was made in the context of Jesus' parable of the pounds (Matthew's version has "talents"). In other words, the quality of the life of heaven will be significantly impacted by how we choose to live now. Ellen G. White supports such a reading in her book *Christ's Object Lessons* (363): "Even if we do not lose our souls, we shall realize in eternity the result of our unused talents. For all the knowledge and ability that we might have gained and did not, there will be an eternal loss." That "eternal loss" is the negative side of the principle. But there is a positive side as well. ". . . those who have made the most of their privileges to reach the highest attainments here, will take these valuable acquisitions with them into the future life. They have sought and obtained that which is imperishable. The capability to appreciate the glories that 'eye hath not seen nor ear heard,' will be proportionate to the attainments reached in the cultivation of the faculties in this life." Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 49. Apparently, the education, training and experience that we gain now will impact us and others throughout eternity.

We may not know much about what heaven is like but there is much we can do about what we will be like when we get there. The qualities that we develop here will serve us throughout eternity. Preparation for eternity involves a number of things: 1) Developing the talents and gifts God has given us. We can do that by singing, speaking, writing, serving, and doing whatever is set before us "as to the Lord" (Col 3:23, NIV). We can be all that we can be at whatever is set before us. 2) Being faithful in the little things. This is an expansion and clarification of the previous point. The ideal preparation to serve in the bigger things of eternity is being faithful in the everyday things that are set before us. Nothing that you do is unimportant in the ultimate scheme of things. Everything set before you is worth doing well.

3) Preparation for the kingly role in eternity. In God's kingdom, ruling is not about "power over", privilege, and adulation. Rulership is about service and is to be done in humility. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Only those who have been truly humbled can handle great power without falling into pride and corruption. But here is the problem. If you pray for humility, expect trouble, because God will answer that prayer with challenges and difficulties. You see, the bigger the trials people face now, the better is their preparation to serve with humility then. The more trust that God can place in us, the higher the position He may be able to share. Special trials yield special usefulness. The most troubled of the seven churches of Revelation, Laodicea, is the only one who is invited to sit on the throne

with Christ. Nothing would be more damaging in a universe founded on love than a proud ruler who uses authority to benefit themselves, to bend other's will, to be in control. The rulers of the universe must be humble rulers--servant leaders. Apparently, angels have not been offered the high positions of rulership (Heb 2:5). Only those who have been truly humbled can be trusted to rule in highest places.

4) Preparation for the priestly role in eternity. Efforts made to understand ourselves and the science of relationships will bear fruit in the eternity that the Bible projects. Today, relationship with Jesus is normally invisible. We are relating to a person we cannot see, hear or touch. In eternity that relationship will be face to face, which will enable much greater depth. "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, NIV. Study, prayer, and communion with Jesus today prepares us for a much deeper relationship in the future. One way to prepare is to keep a life notebook, an honest, open diary about one's experiences as a Christian. Reflecting on the invisible relationship now will become a good basis for one's testimony then.

Relationship with the invisible requires a level of focus that is not natural to us. There are many distractions in today's world and many "lesser things" that we often waste time on. Developing one's relationship with the invisible Christ invites one to abandon as many lesser things as we reasonably can. Paul got a glimpse of the invisible things when he was caught up to heaven in vision (2 Corinthians 12:4, ESV). "And I know that this man was caught up into paradise--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows-- and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter." It was on the basis of that eternal focus that he could "count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." Phil 3:8, ESV.

Our attitude toward the future affects our behavior now. "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward." Hebrews 11:24-26, NIV. John's vision of the New Jerusalem encourages readers to focus steadily on the reward to come. People spend most of their time on the things of the world. It is necessary to eat, to raise children, and fix the places in which we live. So, identifying the "lesser things" is a step toward a deeper and clearer focus on eternity.

In closing, I want to mention one more point--that in the New Jerusalem there is no more temple (Rev 21:22). A temple in heaven has been mentioned a number of times in Revelation (Rev 7:15; 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5-8; 16:1, 17). But in the New Jerusalem there is none. God and the Lamb themselves are the temple. The absence of a temple draws the reader full circle back to the beginning of the Bible, drawing its major themes to a close.

In the beginning, God and humanity were together in a garden (Genesis 1-2). Before the entrance of sin, there were no barriers in between. But after sin, human beings were alienated from God. From that time on, God was inside the Garden while Adam and Eve were

permanently located outside the garden (Gen 3:23-24). A major story of the Bible as a whole is overcoming the barrier to relationship between God and humanity.

In the Old Testament, God introduces a temporary solution to the problem of sin, a tent sanctuary with a Most Holy Place, a Holy Place, and an outer court (Exodus 25:8). The people as a whole could not meet God face-to-face in the sanctuary, Instead, they had representative access through the priests. Once a year, and only once, a single human being, the High Priest, entered briefly into the Most Holy Place, representing the entire nation (Lev 16:2-34). This act foreshadowed the reconciliation of the whole human race to God (Exod 19:5-6).

In light of Christ's death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement, humanity has been elevated in Him to heavenly places (Eph 2:6). In Christ, every gathering of the church becomes a temple with the living Shekinah in its midst (Matt 18:20; 1 Cor 3:17; 2 Cor 6:16). In the imagery of the lampstands (Rev 1:12-18), the churches of Revelation are placed in the direct presence of the risen Christ. They have genuine access to God in Christ. The limited access of the Old Testament sanctuary has been expanded spiritually to all who are in Christ (Rom 5:2). But this access is still "now and not yet". It is limited to the spiritual dimension. Face-to-face access is not yet a reality. That limitation is ended in the New Jerusalem.

The New Jerusalem is a perfect cube. The Most Holy Place is the only other cube in the entire Bible. So the New Jerusalem represents the kind of face-to-face contact with God available to Israel's High Priest on the Day of Atonement. In the New Jerusalem, heaven has come to earth. God and His people are together again. Eden is restored. There is no more need for a temple because God and His people are together once more. The experience of eternity is relationship with God. Relationship with God was broken by sin. In Christ, such relationship is made possible again. And in eternity, face-to-face relationship with God will be completely restored.

The book of Revelation ends with a picture of everything beautiful and the absence of everything evil. Temptation, sorrow, tears, death, and the curse have all been banished from the universe. Everything that harms God's creation, or causes sorrow and death, is gone. Everything that releases the power of full human potential is there. Eternity is everything human beings always wanted and more. It is well-worth considering in the major decisions of the present life.