

CHAPTER 22

The first five verses of chapter 22 are connected with chapter 21, wherein the New Jerusalem was described. We are now told of a river of pure water proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. *"In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."* How can a single tree be on both sides of the river? Swete interprets the word *tree* as a collective reference, stating, *"The picture presented is that of a river flowing through the broad street which intersects the city, a row of trees being on either side."*¹ To what does the "healing of the nations" refer? Swete says it cannot refer to illness, since there is now no more curse (vs. 3). Archer says, *"Apparently also the leaves will bring blessing to all the peoples and nations that live in this city, blessing described as 'healing' (therapeia) from any and all diseases or pains that might ever threaten their health."*²

The close of verse 5 presents a problem for commentators. *"There shall be no night there; they need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever."* Who shall reign forever and ever, and over whom shall they reign?

Ladd is succinct in his answer: *"The text does not say whom they reign over, nor is it important."* The "they" are apparently the redeemed.³

Seiss is a bit more verbose:

Such are all the members of the Church of the first-born, the elect, the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, the sharers in the administration of that holy kingdom It tells of the very highest honor and dignity, of the closest intimacy with eternal power and authority, of the most inward nearness and participation in the administration of divine government. But it tells also of mighty activities and responsible duties. It shows us most clearly that the heaven of the glorified saints is not one of idleness. . . .

But these glorified ones are to "reign to the ages of the ages," and their "kingdom is an everlasting kingdom;" and as they cannot reign without subjects, so nations on earth must last coequally with their regency. Both their office, and the activities in which their sublimest happiness is located, must fail them, if the nations over whom their rule is, ever cease to be. They neither marry, nor are given in marriage; for they are as the angels of God. But their subjects are of a different order, and their dominion and glory shall grow forever, by the ceaseless augmentation of the number of their subjects throughout unending generations.⁴

Walvoord passes over the verse rather quickly: *"The eternal character of the reign of these who are described as servants is another indication that this is the eternal state."*⁵

1 Henry B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 299, cited by Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 330.

2 Gleason Archer, unpublished class notes.

3 George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pp. 288-289.

4 J. A. Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, pp. 440, 443.

5 John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 332.

Culver writes: "Heaven will provide not only rest but rewarding activities which are said to be reigning (2 Tim. 2:12), judging (Matt. 19:28), serving God (Rev. 7:15; 22:3), praising Him (Rev. 14:2,3; 15:3,4; 19:5,6), and praying (Rev. 6:9-13; 7:11,12)."⁶

Among the variety of interpretations, there is something that seems logical with Seiss' view; but still it poses many problems. It seems best to leave the subject for another time.

Another verse that raises interest is verse 11: "*He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.*" What do the commentators offer?

Ladd writes: "In view of his sense of the imminence of the end, John in imagination transports himself to the end when repentance will indeed be impossible--when the stand one has taken for Christ or Antichrist will be finally and irrevocably determinative."⁷

What does Walvoord think?

In effect, he advocates status quo for both the wicked and the righteous. By this he does not mean that men should remain unmoved by the prophecies of this book, but rather that if the prophecies are rejected, there is no other message that will work. If the warnings of the book are not sufficient, there is no more that God has to say. . . . There is a sense also in which present choices fix character; a time is coming when change will be impossible. Present choices will become permanent in character.⁸

Seiss comments as follows:

The direct bearing of the statement is that of an argument for the writing and publishing of these revelations, and the holding of them up to the view of all men, over against the non-effect or ill effect they may have upon the wicked and unbelieving, or upon the Antichrist and his adherents, who is emphatically the unjust and unclean one. . . . Let the unjust one be the more confirmed in his unbelief and wickedness, let the filthy one go on in his idolatries and moral defilement with all the greater hardihood and blasphemy--that is not to restrain the making known of what shall come to pass.⁹

We have now come to the close of the revelation given to John. From chapter 6 through chapter 18, John received, for the most part, visions of horror and carnage. The utter dread and dismay of such scenes cannot readily be comprehended by us, for we have only the written word by which to visualize them. But consider that John may have seen them in "3D living color." Surely such visions would have been more than enough to overwhelm him. And then, suddenly, in chapter 19 everything changes, and John sees the coming of the Lord in glory. "*And I heard, as it were, the*

6 Robert D. Culver, *Systematic Theology*, pg. 1102.

7 George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pg. 292.

8 John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 334-335.

9 J. A. Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, pp. 460-461.

voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, 'Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!' " Heaven is then opened and Christ comes riding on his white horse. He makes war with the Beast and all who will not worship the KING OF KINGS, the LORD OF LORDS! What a thrilling vision when John next sees the saints reigning with Christ in the millennial kingdom--a kingdom for which every Jewish believer has longed since the time of Abraham. A new earth and new heavens follow, and New Jerusalem is seen in all its glory and magnificence descending from above. *"The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light."* John then hears Jesus saying, *"Surely I am coming quickly."* Jesus is looking forward to his own return. Then follows that moving statement of John, *"Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"*

How is it possible that anyone of sound mind can proclaim, as Walvoord does, "For John the important event is the coming of the Lord for him at the rapture of the church"?¹⁰ No! It is not a pre-trib rapture for which John yearns. His burning desire is to see Christ coming in power and great glory to receive the kingdom promised him from the foundation of the earth. His emotions are stirred by the vision of an exalted Christ sitting on the throne of David, his saints reigning with him. And when Christ descends at the sound of the last trumpet, John together with the rest of the saints, living and dead, shall rise to meet him in the air in order to escort him back to the earth where Christ shall begin his reign.

¹⁰ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 339.

APPENDIX 1

Excerpt from *Light from the Ancient East*
Adolph Deissmann¹¹

It is one of the great contributions of modern scholarship that we now understand what the early Christians felt when they read in Paul's Epistles of the Parousia of the Lord Jesus Christ. Scholars and archaeologists have been digging in the rubbish-heaps of Egypt and found this word used in scores of documents in everyday life for the *arrival* of kings and rulers, or the visit following. Let us have this in the words of a scholar, who has rendered priceless services in explaining the words of Paul. In his great work, *Light from the Ancient East*,¹² Deissmann deals with the word *Parousia*. I quote some paragraphs from it:--

Yet another of the central ideas of the oldest Christian worship receives light from the new texts, namely: parousia, "advent, coming," a word expressive of the most ardent hopes of a St. Paul. We now may say that the best interpretation of the Primitive Christian hope of the Parousia is the old Advent text, "Behold, thy *King* cometh unto thee" (Zech. 9:9; Matt. 21:5). From the Ptolemaic period down into the 2nd cent. A.D. we are able to trace the word in the East as *a technical expression for the arrival or the visit of the king or the emperor* (or other persons in authority, or troops). The parousia of the sovereign must have been something well known even to the people, as shown by the facts that special payments in kind and taxes to defray the cost of the parousia were exacted, that in Greece *a new era was reckoned from the parousia of the Emperor Hadrian*, that all over the world advent-coins were struck after a parousia of the emperor, and that we are even able to quote examples of advent sacrifices.

The subject of parousia dues and taxes in Egypt has been treated in detail by Wilcken. The oldest passage he mentions is in the Flinders Petrie Papyrus II. 39e, of the 3rd cent. B.C., where, according to his ingenious interpretation, contributions are noted for a crown of gold to be presented to the king at his parousia: "for another crown on the occasion of the parousia, 12 artabae." This papyrus supplies an exceptionally fine background of contrast to the figurative language of St. Paul, in which *Parousia* (or *Epiphany*, "appearing") and *crown* occur in collocation. While the sovereigns of this world expect at their parousia a costly crown for themselves, "at the parousia of our Lord Jesus" the apostle will wear a crown--"the crown of glory" (I Thess. 2:19), won by his work among the Churches, or "the crown of righteousness" which the Lord will give to him and to all them that have loved His appearing--2 Timothy 4:8.

I have found another characteristic example in a petition, *circa* 113 B.C., which was found among the wrappings of the mummy of a sacred crocodile. A parousia of King Ptolemy, the second, who called himself *Soter* ("saviour"), is expected, and for this occasion a great requisition has been issued for corn, which is being collected at Cerceosiris by the village headman and the elders of the peasants. Speaking of this and another delivery of corn, these officials say: "and applying ourselves diligently, both night and day, unto fulfilling that which was set before us and the provision of 80 artabae which was imposed for the parousia of the king . . ."

Are not these Egyptian peasants, toiling day and night in expectation of the parousia of their

11 Cited by Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, pp. 143-145; the first paragraph is Reese's introduction.

12 The Greek quotations are omitted.

saviour king, an admirable illustration of our Lord's words (Luke 18:7) about the elect who cry day and night to God, in expectation of the coming of the Son of Man (Luke 18:8)?

As in Egypt, so also in Asia: the uniformity of Hellenistic civilisation is proved once more in this instance. An inscription of the 3rd cent. B.C. at Olbia mentions a parusia of King Saitapharnes, the expenses of which were a source of grave anxiety to the city fathers, until a rich citizen, named Protogenes, paid the sum--900 pieces of gold, which were presented to the king. Next comes an example of great importance as proving an undoubted sacral use of the word, viz., an inscription of the 3rd cent. B.C., recording a cure at the temple of Asclepius at Epidaurus, which mentions a parusia of the healer (saviour) god Asclepius--"and Asclepius manifested his parusia." For the combination of parusia with manifestation see Thess. 2:8. Other examples of Hellenistic age known to me are a passage in Polybius--"to expect earnestly the parusia of Antiochus" (the verb is very characteristic, cf. Rom. 8:19)--referring to a parusia of King Antiochus the Great, and two letters of King Mithradates VI., Eupator of Pontus at the beginning of his first war with the Romans, 88 B.C., recorded in an inscription at Nysa in Caria--"And now, having learnt of my parusia." The prince, writing to Leonippus the Praefect of Caria, makes twofold mention of his own parusia, *i.e.* his invasion of the province of Asia.

It is the legitimate continuation of the Hellenistic usage that in the Imperial period the parusia of the sovereign should shed a special brilliance. Even the visit of a scion of the Imperial house, G. Caesar (+ 4 A.D.), a grandson of Augustus, was, as we know from an inscription--"in the first year of the epiphany [synonymous with parusia] of Gaius Caesar"--made the beginning of a new era in Cos. In memory of the visit of the Emperor Nero, in whose reign St. Paul wrote his letters to Corinth, the cities of Corinth and Patras struck advent-coins. *Adventus Aug(usti) Cor(inthi)* is the legend on one, *Adventus Augusti* on the other. Here we have corresponding to the Greek *parusia* the Latin word *advent*, which the Latin Christians afterwards simply took over, and which is to-day familiar to every child among us.

How graphically it must have appealed to the Christians of Thessalonica, with their living conception of the parusiae of the rulers of this world, when they read in St. Paul's second letter--("the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus . . . shall destroy by the manifestation of His parusia, whose parusia is according to the workings of Satan" 2 Thess. 2:8-9)--of the Satanic "parusia" of Antichrist, who was to be destroyed by "the manifestation of the parusia" of the Lord Jesus!

How deeply a parusia stamped itself on the memory is shown by the eras that were reckoned from parusiae. We have heard already of an era at Cos dating from the epiphany of G. Caesar, and we find that in Greece a new era was begun with the first visit of the Emperor Hadrian in the year 124;--the magnificent monuments in memory of that parusia still meet the eye at Athens and Eleusis. There is something peculiarly touching in the fact that towards the end of the 2nd century, at the very time when the Christians were beginning to distinguish the "first parusia" of Christ from the "second," an inscription at Tegea was dated "in the year 69 of the first parusia of the god Hadrian in Greece."

Even in early Christian times the parallelism between the parusia of the representative of the State and the parusia of Christ was clearly felt by the Christians themselves. This is shown by a newly discovered petition of the small proprietors of the village of Aphrodite in Egypt to the Dux of the Thebaid in the year 537-538 A.D., a papyrus which at the same time is an interesting

memorial of Christian popular religion in the age of Justinian. "It is a subject of prayer with us night and day, to be held worthy of your welcome parusia." The peasants whom a wicked Pagarch has been oppressing, write thus to the high official, after assuring him with a pious sigh at the beginning that they awaited him "as they watch eagerly from Hades the future parusia of Christ the everlasting God."

Quite closely related to parusia is another cult-word epiphaneia, "epiphany, appearing." How closely the two ideas were connected in the age of the N.T. is shown by the passage in 2 Thess. 2:8, already quoted, and by the associated usage of the Pastoral Epistles, in which "Epiphany" or "Appearing" nearly always means the future parusia of Christ, though once it is the parusia which patristic writers afterwards called "the first." Equally clear, however, is the witness of an advent coin struck by Actium-Nicopolis for Hadrian, with the legend: "Epiphany of Augustus"; the Greek word coincides with the Latin word "advent" generally used on coins . . . the new proofs available are very abundant.

APPENDIX 2

"PREFACE OF BLESSING"

by Cecil Yates Biss¹³

This argument¹⁴ assumes that the chapters of the Revelation follow one another in a chronological sequence, so that what is narrated in Chapter 4 (the vision of the crowned elders) must be fulfilled long before that which is recorded in Chapter 19, viz. the appearing in glory of the Lord. This assumption, however, is a fallacy, as a very brief examination of the matter will show. The order of narration is not historical but moral; that which occurs last being often here (as elsewhere) narrated first. Indeed, it is usual in all prophetic Scripture to exhibit the final scene of triumph and glory--"the preface of blessing", as it has been most appropriately called--before the intervening development of evil and of judgment. A conspicuous example is found in the second chapter of Isaiah, which contains the first of the visions granted to that prophet. The first five verses present a glorious picture of the final blessing of Israel in the millennial day followed by a terrible description of the judgments which shall precede the Day of the Lord and the humbling of the nation under His hand.

Furthermore, the Revelation, like other books of prophecy, is composed of a series of visions which present, in different aspects and with varying details, the events of the same, or parts of the same period of history, the rule being that the earlier visions give outlines, the later ones details, of the same events. There is not the slightest difficulty in perceiving that after the vision of the glory of the risen saints in heaven given in Chapters 4 and 5 of the Revelation, Chapter 6 gives an outline which reaches to the close of the present dispensation, treating, in fact, of the same events as are related in different connections, in Chapter 19. That the vision presented in Chapters 4 and 5 is anticipatory is proved by the fact that coincidentally with the worship in heaven of the crowned elders and living ones representing the risen saints, the earth at large, and Israel in it, are presented in relations of millennial blessing. The words "they reign on the earth" (Chapter 5:10) which Dr. Tregelles asserts, form the true reading (see ante, note on p. 42) must point to Israel enjoying the fulfillment of Isaiah 60:8-12. And even if the saints on earth, whose prayers are presented before the throne by the crowned elders in heaven, could be supposed to be the Remnant of Israel during the days of Antichristian tribulation (a supposition full of the most irreconcilable difficulties, but which has been strongly urged), it is impossible to overlook the fact that the earth with all its inhabitants (verse 13) is represented as joining, at the same time, in the song of praise to God and the Lamb. This could never take place until the period of Antichristian evil was over, and the Lord was exalted throughout the earth (see Ps. 46,47), that is, until after His second advent. And yet it is frequently urged that "the structure of the Revelation" is the strongest argument for the rapture of the saints at a secret coming occurring some time prior to the Lord's appearing in glory!

It will be easily seen by the following outline of the Revelation, that the principle of repetition is followed throughout that book, as indeed is the case, generally, in all the prophetic Scriptures.

Chapter 1 -- General Introduction.

13 This material is taken from an appendix to Tregelles, *The Hope of Christ's Second Coming*, pp. 101-103; the appendix appeared in the 6th edition of the book and was written by Cecil Yates Biss.

14 The argument Dr. Biss refers to is from Tregelles, *The Hope of Christ's Second Coming*, pp. 68-69.

Chapters 2,3 -- The decline and approaching judgment of corporate Gentile Christianity, as represented by the Seven Churches of Asia.

Chapters 4,5 -- A vision of the heavenly glory of the risen "Church of the firstborn", and the Millennial blessing of the earth; forming the "preface of blessing" to the Revelation as a whole.

Chapter 6 -- A vision, in outline, of the judgments immediately preceding the Lord's Advent. The "preface of blessing" is given in verse 2, where the Lord is displayed as the Conqueror; after which the chapter retraces the narration, giving instruction regarding points prior to His appearing.

Chapters 7-9 -- A section giving fuller details of the Divine judgments which precede the Advent. The "preface of blessing" is given in Chapter 7, which sets forth the two elect bodies who are preserved for blessing at that period; first, The Elect Remnant of Israel (Chapter 7:1-8); and, second, "The Church of the first-born ones which are written in Heaven." (Cf. Heb. 12 .23.)

Chapters 10-13 -- A section giving still fuller details of the same judgments, but restricted to the last 1,260 days of the dispensation, i.e. the last "halfweek" of Daniel (Dan. 9:27). Hence this portion of the Revelation is called "a little book." The plan of the chapters is as follows:

Chapter 10 -- The "preface of blessing"--a vision of the Lord's coming in power and glory.

Chapter 11 -- Jerusalem's history during the 1,260 days' testimony of the two witnesses.

Chapter 12 -- Christianity outcast and persecuted.

Chapter 13 -- Antichrist reigning supreme.

Chapter 14 -- A vision enlarging certain of the points before mentioned, such as the testimony, sufferings, and blessed hope of the persecuted saints. The "preface of blessing" is in verses 1-5.

Chapters 15-18 -- A section dealing specially with the judgment of Babylon.

Chapter 15 -- The "preface of blessing": a vision of the Millennial glory and reign of Christ and His saints.

Chapter 16 -- Judgments upon "the seat of the Beast and all who follow him."

Chapter 17 -- Moral Babylon: (The Antichristian system.)

Chapter 18 -- Material Babylon: (The capital city of Antichrist's dominion.)

Chapter 19 -- The coming of the Lord in glory.

Chapter 20 -- The Millennial Reign, closed by a final revolt against God: the final judgment of the wicked dead.

Chapter 21:1-8 -- The New Heavens and Earth--Eternity.

Chapter 21:9-22:5 -- The Heavenly City, in its relations with the Earth during the Millennium. The proof of this is seen in 22.2--"the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." In the New Heaven and New Earth (21.1) there is no more curse, sorrow, crying, nor pain, "for the former things have passed away."

Chapter 22:6 to end -- Concluding words of warning and promise.