

Living Word Fellowship Church

An Expository Explanation of Revelation Chapter 22

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I. The Expanded Explanation of Key Words and Apocalyptic Definitions:

A. Tree of life - The tree's leaves ... are for the healing of the nations. Based on this statement some have referred this situation back to the millennial times when there will be sickness and healing. However, another meaning seems to be indicated. The word "healing" (therapeian) can be understood as "health-giving." The English "therapeutic" is derived from this Greek word. Even though there is no sickness in the eternal state, the tree's fruit and leaves seem to contribute to the physical well-being of those in the eternal state.^[1]

1. Vs. 3 - As the curse of Adam's sin led to illness requiring healing and death, so in the eternal state there will be no curse; therefore no healing of illness is necessary.^[2] This is essential for those who come into eternal living with earthly bodies.

2. The reference to the "tree of life" also shows that John understood the foreseen fructification of the new cosmos in Ezek. 47:12 as the reestablishment of an eternal Eden. Gen. 3:22, 24 refers to the "tree of life" and says that if Adam had been able to eat from it, he would have been able to "live forever." Presumably, the tree there represented the presence of God, which would impart eternal life to all who could enter it.^[3]

3. The allusion to Ezek. 47:12 supports a picture of trees growing on either side of the river, so that the singular "tree" of 22:2 is likely a collective reference to "trees." A collective interpretation is consistent with Ezekiel's picture of trees growing on both sides of the river bank, and it is in line with the logic of the picture in Rev. 22:1-2 (how could one tree grow on either side

of the river?). The absence of the article may point further to a collective meaning. The one tree of life in the first garden has become many trees of life in the escalated paradisaical state of the second garden (for OT and Jewish references to a future escalated temple in contrast to the old temple see on 21:22). But since these trees are all of the same kind as the original tree, they can be referred to from the perspective of their corporate unity as “the tree of life” ^[4]

B. “Water of life” could be appositional genitive (“waters, which are life”) or more likely adjectival genitive (“living waters”). The “living waters” are a portrayal of eternal life (so 22:17) and have their origin in God and the Lamb, as the concluding clause of 22:1b bears out (cf. Jer. 2:13; see above on 7:17, where additional possible OT and Jewish parallels for the “waters of life” metaphor are noted). If the waters symbolize the Spirit, as in the similar portrayal in John 7:37–39, then Rev. 22:1 is an early picture of the later Christian confession that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (water also symbolizes the Spirit in the OT, Jewish writings, and elsewhere in the NT; see further below). ^[5]

1. This fellowship is reserved in Revelation for those who have maintained their faith in the Lamb’s atoning death and their testimony to his redemptive work. That the river is “pure” and the water “bright as crystal” indicates the purifying nature of the water. The water purifies away people’s sins so that they may enter into the intimate presence of God, as portrayed in 22:3–5 (so similarly 22:14, 17). ^[6]

2. The millennial waters represent full Gospel grace; these of new Jerusalem represent Gospel glory. Their continuous flow from God, the Fountain of life, symbolizes the uninterrupted life derived by the saints, ever fresh, from Him: fulness of joy, as well as perpetual vitality. Like pure crystal, free from every taint (cf. ch. 4:6). **clear**—‘bright.’ ^[7]

3. Their continuous flow from God, the Fountain of life, symbolizes the uninterrupted continuance of life derived by the saints, ever fresh, from Him: life in fulness of joy, as well as perpetual vitality. Like pure crystal, it is free from every taint: compare Rev 4:6, “before the throne a sea of glass, like crystal.” ^[8]

C. **His servants will serve Him.** The highest joy and privilege of the saints in eternity will be to serve their blessed Lord, even though it is true that they will also reign with Him (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 5:10; 20:4–6). They will have a privileged place before the throne for they will see His face. The implication is that they are under the Lord’s good favor and in His “inner circle.” This intimacy is also indicated by the fact that His name will be on their foreheads (cf. 2:17; 3:12; 7:3; 14:1). Their freedom to be in the presence of God indicates that they will then be in their glorified bodies (cf. 1 John 3:2).^[9]

1. The assertion that “his name [will be] on their foreheads” intensifies the notion of intimate fellowship with God. It is beyond coincidence that God’s name was written on the high priest’s forehead in the OT. This expresses further the priestly nature of God’s new people^[10]

2. That “servants” refers to all saints means that the visions in the book have been “shown” not only to John but in some sense also to all in the churches, who are “servants” along with John (see on 1:1).

3. The second eternal activity of the redeemed besides worship (21:22) is service around the heavenly throne, which symbolizes God’s eternal rule. Because the effects of sin are reversed, the saints are now free to reign eternally. To see God’s face is an idiom suggesting personal contact and fellowship. Although Jesus’ time on earth was brief, he promised that in heaven his disciples would be with him forever (John 14:2–3). God’s servants continue to be identified as those marked with his name on their foreheads (Rev. 7:3; 14:1). The reign begun by the martyrs during the thousand years (20:4–6) now continues for eternity.^[11]

4. At the risk of extracting overliteral precision from the picture here, it may nevertheless be profitable to consider that there is a sense in which there are subjects over whom the saints rule. They participate in the judgment of unholy people and angels at the last day (e.g., 1 Cor. 6:2–3; Rev. 2:26–27; 17:14; 19:14). The saints will exercise this aspect of their rule forever in that the punishment involved in this last judgment will last for eternity (see on 14:10–11; 20:10).^[12]

D. **22:4. See His face.** This is an expression in the Bible for being fully aware of the power and presence of God (Job 33:26; Pss. 10:11; 17:15; cf. 3 John 11). This was often considered a blessing bestowed upon the faithful at the end of time (Ps. 84:7; Matt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14; Jub 1:28; 4 Ezra 7:91; 1 Enoch 102:8). Moses was forbidden to see God (Exod. 33:20–23) because the sight of him would be fatal (Exod. 3:6; 20:19; cf. Mart. Isa. 3:9). **Foreheads.** See comments on Rev. 7:3, 4–8; 13:6. [\[13\]](#)

1. Now the divine presence fully permeates the eternal temple and dwelling place of the saints, since “they will see his face,” a hope expressed by OT saints (Pss. 11:4–7; 27:4; 4 Ezra 7:98; cf. Ps. 42:2; Testament of Zebulun 9:8). [\[14\]](#)

2. The whole community of the redeemed is considered priests serving in the temple and privileged to see God’s face in the new holy of holies, which now encompasses the entire temple-city. Whether this refers to God or the Lamb is unclear, but the godly will be in the presence of both (for the singular pronoun see on 22:3). [\[15\]](#)

E. Just as the tears that God will wipe away refer not to pains being endured throughout eternity but to a once-for-all relief from such pains (see 21:4; 7:16–17), so it is likewise here. As was the case with the prophetic language of Isaiah in Rev. 21:24–26, John likewise uses the imagery of Ezek. 47:12, which corresponded to earthly realities that he could understand, to describe eternal realities beyond his comprehension. [\[16\]](#)

F. “The spirits of the prophets” may refer to a special class of prophets (as in 10:7) whose testimony is inspired by the Spirit (taking “prophets” as an objective genitive: “the Spirit inspiring prophets”). The expression may thus refer to OT and NT prophets, especially those through whom God left an inscripturated record. So NEB: “The Lord God who inspires the prophets has sent his angel to show his *servants*” (that is, all saints in the churches; see further below). [\[17\]](#)

1. But since “the Lord God of the spirits of the prophets” is bracketed by allusions to Daniel 2, it is probable that “prophets” is restricted to a special class of officeholders or of persons that God specially commissioned to reveal his word to the OT and NT covenant communities. ^[18]

G. **22:10. The time is near.** The only other apocalyptic text where a prophet is commanded to seal up his book is that of Daniel (8:26), where the prophet is commanded to seal up his scroll because the prophecy contained therein concerned the distant future (cf. Dan. 12:4, 9; cf. 4 Ezra 12:37; 14:5–6; T. Mos. 1:17–18). Yet here John says that **the time is near.** ^[19]

H. 22:12. The words with which this verse begins: Behold, I am coming soon! are the same as those at the beginning of verse 7. In connection with His return, which will be “soon” (cf. vv. 7, 20), a reward is promised to His saints for what they have done for Christ. The reference is to the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10–11). The final judgments of both the wicked and the righteous will be judgments of works. This is the joyous expectation of those who are faithful and the fear of those who have not been faithful. ^[20]

1. This coming is a part of the revelation mentioned in v 10. In chs. 1–3 Christ’s “coming” refers either to comings before the end of history or his final coming to conclude history (see the comments on 1:7; 2:5, 16; 3:3, 11). ^[21]

I. **The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” (22:17).** For the second time, the Holy Spirit speaks directly (cf. 14:13). He is joined by the church presented again as the bride. Responding to Jesus’ threefold announcement that he is coming soon, the church now answers three times in a crescendo that builds until the end of the book (22:20). The first invitation to “Come” begins with that of the Spirit and the bride. The Spirit, echoing the words of Jesus, speaks to the churches in the hearing sayings in Revelation 2–3 (cf. Ezek. 3:27). The second “Come” issues from those who are hearing in the seven churches. This same group is now itself invited to come and partake of the spiritual blessing of the water of life. ^[22]

J. **Bright and morning star** - Allusion to Isa. 60:1–3 may be included together with Isa. 11:10: “Arise, shine, for your light has come ... nations will come to your light and kings to the *brightness* (λαμπρότητι) of your rising.” If both Isaiah texts are in John’s mind, then they serve to highlight Jesus as the one to whom the nations come for salvation, a theme that has been developed in 21:22–26. ^[23]

K. Such false teaching amounts to “adding to” God’s law. It is also tantamount to “taking away from” God’s law, since it violates the positive laws against idolatry, consequently nullifying their validity. The disobedience of following this false teaching is probably included in the dual warning of Deut. 4:2 and 12:32, as Deut. 29:19–20 confirms. ^[24]

1. Therefore, “adding and taking away” are not general disobedience to the divine word, but adherence to false teaching about the inscripturated word. Belief in the abiding truth of God’s word is the presupposition for positive obedience to it (Deut. 4:2: “you shall not add ... nor take away *in order that* you may keep the commandments of the Lord”). The ancient Near Eastern treaty documents after which Deuteronomy 4 is modeled were also protected against intentional alteration by means of inscriptional sanctions and curses. ^[25]

2. The twofold warning of 22:18–19 is directed against those who foster or follow such seductive teaching. The Deuteronomic background is remarkably suitable here since the descriptions in the vice lists in 21:8, 27 and 22:15 have all concluded with emphasis on the deceptiveness of the ungodly in connection with idolatry. ^[26]

3. As noted in the introductory comments on 22:6–21, the main point of the whole book is that faithful endurance and obedience to the end will result in eternal blessing and reward, with the ultimate result of glorifying God and Christ (see further on 1:6; 4:9–11; 5:12–14; 19:7–8; cf. 21:1–22:5). ^[27]

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