

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Lecture 30, Revelation 22, New Jerusalem and How to Read the Book of Revelation

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is the final session 30, Revelation 22, New Jerusalem, and How to Read the Book of Revelation.

So who are the nations in 21, verses 24 and 26, and where do they come from? Some have interpreted this as a reference to the nations who are redeemed throughout all of history and now they are in the New Jerusalem and that's certainly possible.

We saw back in chapter 5 and even chapter 1 that Christ has redeemed people from every tribe, language, tongue, and nations, and some would suggest that's what we see here. However, when you read the text of Revelation, it appears that the reference to the nations and the kings in this section, especially the kings of the earth, John calls them the kings of the earth and now the nations, seem to be those who have colluded with the beast, seem to be those who have sided with the beast and whose rule and now they enter the New Jerusalem. In other words, what I think is going on here is this.

Although we've seen that they've already been destroyed and judged in chapters 19 and 20, now they enter the New Jerusalem. What I think is going on is that John is juxtaposing two images, one of final salvation and one of final judgment, to demonstrate the complete nature of God's judgment but also the complete nature of his salvation. John is not interested in quantifying the categories, as if to say what the survivors of those who are judged in 19 and 20 make it.

He doesn't tell us that, nor does he; obviously, I don't think John thinks that every single last person of the nations enters the New Jerusalem, but John speaks in rather absolute terms. On the one hand, all the kings of the earth and all the nations are judged in 19 and 20. Now, we have the kings of the earth and the nations entering the New Jerusalem.

What's going on? Like other images in Revelation, we shouldn't, I don't think, take this too literally. But instead, this is a way of John demonstrating the complete judgment of the nations, but also the complete salvation of the nations to be included in the New Jerusalem. And we've seen the reason for this is, part of what John must demonstrate, and he's hinted at already, is the kingdom of this world must become the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ.

Part of that means also that the nations, those who are under the rule of the beast, must now be transferred to the rule of God and Jesus Christ. And at a literal level, that does not mean every single last person in the nations or everyone who followed the beast, etc., etc., now automatically becomes a part of the New Jerusalem. But once more, it would defeat John's purpose to try to quantify and say 60% of the nations or half of them go to judgment and half to salvation because John wants to demonstrate the complete arrival of God's kingdom, the complete defeat of Satan and his kingdom, and the complete arrival of God's kingdom means that those who are under the rule of the beast, the transfer of the kingdom means that those under the rule of the beast now come under the rule of God himself.

They now belong to God. So, the absolute judgment and absolute salvation scene is simply meant to contrast just that. The absolute comprehensive nature of God's judgment, but also the absolute and comprehensive nature of the salvation that he brings.

And it's possible that we are to understand this at a literal level as those who are not judged and who survive judgment and are converted are the ones who enter the New Jerusalem. But John's language is very different from that. He does not quantify it.

He simply wants to show the stark nature of both judgment and salvation; the complete arrival of and the comprehensive nature of his kingdom in the new creation means the transfer of those under the rule of Satan now to enter the rule of God in Jesus Christ into the New Jerusalem. It's also possible this has sort of a hortatory function. That is, it presents the options that are available to the nations, either salvation or judgment.

But primarily, I think the contrast is mainly rhetorical, not mathematical, as if we're to take these two strictly and literally. But rhetorically contrasting the end time, the final and comprehensive absolute nature of the end time judgment that God brings that completely replaces and overturns the judgment of God on Satan and his kingdom and now transferring the kingdom to himself, transferring the subjects of Satan's rule to his rule is I think what is implied here. At the same time also, I think we should think of this as part of the end-time salvation anticipated by Isaiah, which means the inclusion of the nations.

So I wonder if we should understand this again, not so much as this is a vision of those who have been redeemed throughout history now entering the New Jerusalem. I think given the end time context of chapter 21 and 22 and given the meaning and function of Isaiah 60 and Isaiah 2 is we should see these nations as nations who are converted at the coming of Christ that enter the New Jerusalem in fulfillment of Isaiah 60. Yes, nations are converted throughout church history and become the people of God.

But now, I think that consistent with Isaiah 2 and Isaiah 60, we see an end-time gathering of nations to become the people of God. John doesn't tell us exactly when during the second coming of Christ that takes place. He doesn't say how it takes place.

But clearly, in fulfillment of Isaiah 2 and 60, I think John sees an end gathering and inclusion of the nations to become the people of God. Verse 27 is important because it reminds us that although New Jerusalem is an inclusive city, it still has limits. In verse 20, it says, although all the nations come into it, although they bring their wealth, they contribute to the city, and maybe this is an example of a text that suggests that there's going to actually be activity and meaningful work and activity in the New Jerusalem.

Verse 27 reminds us that at the same time nothing impure will ever enter it. Nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. So Revelation is an inclusive city or the New Jerusalem of a revelation is an inclusive city.

It includes the Gentiles, but at the same time, there are limits. Nothing impure, and no one impure will enter it. Verse 27 then suggests to me that he doesn't think every single last person of the nations is going to enter the New Jerusalem, but only those whose are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Only those who respond in faith and trust in Jesus Christ. So we end with a temple city that is so infused with God's glory and God's presence that it is a temple. As a temple that is so infused with God's presence the nations now come to its light.

The nations are now included without violating the purity and the holiness of the city, and now we are prepared for the last segment, chapter 22, and verses 1-5. Let me read. This is the last part of John's vision of the New Jerusalem temple, and he says, then the angel showed me the river of the water of life as clear as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city on each side of the river stood the tree of life bearing 12 crops of fruits yielding its fruit each month and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations no longer will there be any curse the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him they will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads there will be no more night they will not need the light of the lamp or the light of the sun for the Lord God will be their light and they will reign forever and ever.

And so ends John's final vision of Revelation 21 and 22. Verse 6 will kind of start to bring us back to earth, in a sense, back to the present, but at this point, John ends his vision of the final inheritance, the final climactic event that brings God's redemptive

history to its close. Now, just a number of features to mention in chapter 22, verses 1 through 5. Chapter 22, verses 1 through 5, is not an additional thing that John sees.

This is not an additional place, something that is to be understood as separate from the New Jerusalem Temple so far. 22, 1 through 5 is a different way or further description of the New Jerusalem, New Creation Temple from chapter 21. And 22, verses 1 and 2 is the section that clearly alludes back to or clearly draws our attention back to paradise or back to the Garden of Eden.

And in this section then both Garden and Temple imagery dominate 22, 1 through 5. And every verse in this section I think relates either to the Garden of Eden or to the Temple. And I don't think we should separate the two, as hopefully we'll see. The primary text that John is drawing on, although there are a number of apocalyptic texts that talk about the Garden and include the Garden in eschatological salvation.

John is probably aware of those and may be drawing on those as well. But John is primarily dependent on Ezekiel chapter 47. The first 46 verses describe the Temple, the end time restored Temple that John has been drawing on, and now he also draws on chapter 47.

So 47 begins. The man brought me, the angelic being probably taking him on a visionary tour, and brought me back to the entrance of the Temple. And I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the Temple towards the east, for the Temple faced east, which interestingly is the direction in which Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden, and the cherubim guarded the entrance, the east entrance, drawing the connection between the Garden and the Temple. The water was coming down from under the south side of the Temple, south of the altar.

He then brought me out through the north gate and led me around the outside of the outer gate facing east and the water was flowing from the south side. And as the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits and then led me through the water that was ankle deep. He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee deep.

He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to my waist. And then he measured off another thousand that was so deep he couldn't cross because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in. So he asked me, son of man, Ezekiel, do you see this? Then he led me back to the bank of the river.

When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river. He said to me, this water flows towards the eastern region and goes down into Araba where it enters the sea. When it empties into the sea, the water there becomes fresh.

It swarms with living creatures, or swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh so that where the river flows, everything will live. And I'll stop right there for now.

But I want you to note the connections with Revelation 22, the mention of the river of water of life. Ezekiel does not call it the water of life. John does back in chapter 21.

Part of the promise to those that are offered to God's people is that I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end to him who is thirsty. I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. Now, John uses that same imagery here.

The water that flows out is the river that flows out from Ezekiel 47. Now John calls the water of life. But this is not inconsistent with Ezekiel because Ezekiel makes clear that the water that flows out gives life to all the creatures, and it gives life to everywhere it flows.

So John's description is completely consistent with that. The other big difference is in Ezekiel's vision, the river flows from the Temple. But we've already seen that in John's vision, there is no separate temple.

The Lamb and God are the Temple. Their presence so infuses the new creation, the new Jerusalem, that it doesn't need a temple. So John takes the temple imagery and applies it to the entire city.

Now, what John does is since there's no physical temple, the water can't come from the threshold of the Temple. Instead, now it comes from the throne of God and the Lamb. Why? Because God and the Lamb are the Temple back in chapter 21 and verse 22.

I saw no temple because God and the Lamb are its Temple. So now the water flows from their throne as the fulfillment of Ezekiel's Temple. John may also have in mind Zechariah chapter 14 verse 8 as part of his background as well for the water flowing out.

But the other thing I want to note that is different from Ezekiel's vision is in Ezekiel 47, John saw trees, apparently plural, or I'm sorry Ezekiel, Ezekiel saw trees growing on each side of the river. Now, note what John sees. He says, down the middle of the great street, or it could even be a little, again not that we should push the symbolism, it would be a little strange to have a river running down the middle of the street unless the street is very, very wide.

But the other way to understand this is the plaza or the broad open space in the city, the river could be flowing down through that. But once more I don't know that we're to try to push the imagery too hard and make such literal geographical or architectural sense out of it. But the river flows down the middle of the city and then John, like Ezekiel, John says on each side of the river stood the tree of life, which singular apparently.

Now, some have taken this as what they call a collective image that a tree stands for many trees. So we should understand tree here as many trees, that is the same trees that Ezekiel saw in his vision. Some have concocted rather strange explanations that actually, and to provide a little background, here in Colorado, where I live, one of the most popular and common trees you see is the Aspen tree.

What is noted about the Aspen trees is that you often find them in groves because their root system is actually interconnected underground. You'll have an Aspen tree grow, and its roots underground will then produce others. Some have suggested something similar here, that the tree actually grows on one side, but its roots then cause it to grow on the other side as well under the water, so you have a tree on both sides.

Two things, number one, I don't think we should, as we've already noted, be quite so literal. The idea of one tree on both sides doesn't make sense literally, but I don't think that's the way we're supposed to take John's images and this image here. Instead the purpose is the meaning of these visions and to evoke a response in the reader that will take the reader back to the Old Testament.

And here I think is an example of John beginning with Ezekiel 47 now draws him back to the text that Ezekiel seems to draw upon and that is the Garden of Eden account. So here the backdrop for the tree of life is Genesis 2 verse 9, the tree of life in the Garden of Eden. So this is John's I think this is a deliberate illusion by John back to Genesis 2 verse 9 and moreover I think it's his way of further demonstrating this is the restored Garden.

This is the restored, renewed Garden of Eden with the tree of life at its center. So Ezekiel 47 itself has Garden of Eden imagery, the river flowing out also goes back to chapter 2, the river that flowed out of the Garden. So, the river and the trees of Ezekiel clearly recall the Garden of Eden, and giving life to the creatures recalls the Garden of Eden.

But now John, beginning with Ezekiel 47, also goes back to the original creation account and includes the Tree of Life. Now note what he does with the tree, though. The Tree of Life has 12 crops and bears fruit for 12 months, drawing on Ezekiel 47 again.

But John does something very interesting. The trees here now are for the healing of the nations which we saw enter the New Jerusalem back in chapter 21, verses 24 and 26. So it reflects this notion of the nations entering the New Jerusalem now becoming the people of God.

The healing is to be understood in terms of similar I think back in chapter 5 and chapter 7. Those who now the Lamb has redeemed by his blood, now the leaves give life there for the healing of the nations. They participate in eschatological salvation. But I wonder too if part of the healing is not also these are the nations that are no longer ravaged by the rule of the beast.

These are the nations that are no longer seduced by the beast and harmed and ravaged by the rule of the beast and the rule of Satan. Now, they experience eschatological salvation. Now, the leaves bring them healing.

So it's important to understand that this 22:1, 2, 5, as I said, is not a new geographical location in the New Creation. John isn't seeing something else or something different from the New Jerusalem. It's important to understand that garden and temple language are merged very closely throughout the Old Testament as well as here.

Ezekiel 47 has already done it. Ezekiel 40-47 has already linked temple imagery now in chapter 47 with Garden of Eden imagery by portraying the Temple as a place where the river flows out of the garden and the place where the tree of life and the trees that give life now exist. So, John does not see anything different.

This is entirely consistent with his portrayal of the New Jerusalem as a temple where God's people serve as priests. And that is because, in my understanding, the Old Testament temple was, out of all the things it did, one of the most important things it functioned as a sort of miniature Garden of Eden. If you read the description of the Tabernacle but also the Temple, it's interesting that the author describes it in the Old Testament as having engravings of palm trees and plants and flowers and things like that engraved upon it.

It also has two cherubim and the holy of holies overlooking the ark, probably reflecting the two angels that guarded the entrance to the Garden of Eden as a sanctuary as a holy temple. The flowers, plants, and trees remind us of the trees and the fruitfulness of the Garden of Eden and of the first creation. We've already seen that, for example, back in Ezekiel chapter 28, Adam was portrayed as a priest in the garden wearing the breastplates, the 12 stones from the breastplate of the high priest, so that we should see garden and temple imagery not as distinct from each other, but the Garden of Eden would have originally been a temple, a sacred space where God originally dwelled with Adam and Eve and where Adam and Eve

functioned as priests who served and worshiped God in the garden temple sanctuary.

Now, consistent with that, John also sees the new Jerusalem temple in the new creation now in terms of Garden of Eden imagery. But we'll also see very soon that John's going to turn right back to the Temple priestly language in just a moment. But verse 3, perhaps further describing the healing of the nations in verse 3, John says, no longer will there be any curse.

The reason there won't be any curse, the throne of God and of the Lamb is in the city, and his servants will serve him. That language of cursing, at a glance, could recall the original curse from the Garden of Eden back in chapter 3 because of human sinfulness. But instead, this is an allusion to Zechariah and Zechariah ends in chapter 14, ends with a vision of end time eschatological salvation.

And chapter 14, verse 11, it will be inhabited again, I'm sorry, it will be inhabited, that is Jerusalem, never again will it be destroyed. That language of destruction is the language that occurs here. In fact, in the Septuagint, the Greek word used for destruction in Zechariah 14:11 is very similar to the one used here by John in 22:3. And the idea behind the word in Zechariah is what scholars often translate as a ban on destruction that was pronounced on a nation because of their sinfulness, that is evil nations were to undergo complete destruction.

And now John is saying there will be no more curse, that is, there will be no more destruction of any city or any nation. Because now the healing of the nations rather than destruction of the nations has come. And now they inhabit the new Jerusalem and they participate in eschatological salvation.

And that is because of God's presence. God and the Lamb are now in the city, and their presence now guarantees that there will be no more destruction of the nations, no more ban on destruction. Instead, then verses 4 through 5 return to, I think, portraying the people of God as priests who serve him in the garden temple, which is what Adam and Eve were to do in Genesis 1 and 2. So now they're portrayed as serving him as priests. They also see his face, just that now, as priests, they enter God's presence, and they actually see the presence of God.

They actually see his face, but now it's not restricted to the high priest. Now, all of God's people function as priests and actually see the very presence of God. His name is on their forehead. Clearly, this recalls chapters 7 and 14, where the 144,000 are sealed and they stand before God with the name of the Father on their foreheads.

It also contrasts with the mark of the beast. So now you have God's people standing with the mark of God on their foreheads. It probably indicates intimacy and close relationship with God, but also probably reflects priestly language.

And that would be the turban that Aaron wore on his head when he entered the Temple, when he entered the tabernacle, Exodus 28, for example, and verses 36 through 38. The last phrase I want to focus on in 22, besides the priestly language of service, seeing his face and his presence as the priest having his name on their forehead. And now, again, in verse 5, no need of a separate physical temple because the Lamb and God give it light.

Now, it ends by saying that they will reign forever and ever. First of all, this text is to be seen as the fulfillment of texts such as Revelation chapter 5 and verse 10, where in one of the hymns sung to the Lamb in the heavenly throne room scene, he has redeemed people from every tribe, language, and tongue to make them a kingdom of priests, and they will rule forever. And now we see that fulfilled here in chapter 22 and verse 6, God's people ruling forever.

We also saw in texts such as chapters 2 and 3, where especially the last promise to the overcomer that they would sit on God's throne and rule with him. So throughout the book, we have seen an anticipation of and a promise to the churches that if they overcome, they would rule. Here, we see that fulfilled as God's people now reign forever and ever.

This also should be seen, I think, as the final fulfillment of Exodus chapter 19, verse 6, which was alluded to in chapter 1, verses 5 and 6. Christ has now redeemed people from every tribe and language to become a kingdom of priests. Now, we see them functioning as kings and ruling over all things. In chapter 5 as well that we looked at 5, verse 10, that now Christ has redeemed people from all tribes and languages to become a kingdom of priests and they rule forever.

In other words, in verse 4 and the first part of verse 5, we see the fulfillment of I'm sorry, Exodus 19, 6, that is that they will be priests, which again, Revelation 1 and Revelation 5 picks up. They will be a kingdom of priests. 4 and 5, we see them functioning as priests.

They serve God. They see his face and his presence. They wear the priest headband or turban with God's name on their forehead, but not in a physical temple because God and the Lamb are its light.

That's the priestly part. Now, and they will reign forever and ever, this fulfills the other part, which is that they will be a kingdom. So, although you don't find the word kingdom of priests here, and although you do not see a direct allusion to Exodus 19, 6, I think John is thinking in terms of Exodus 19, 6. Here we see God's people, who are not called a kingdom of priests.

Here, we see them functioning as a kingdom of priests in 22 and 1 through 5. Now, the other thing to say about this text, the other thing to mention about this text is I think we should read it in light of Genesis chapter 1, verses 26 through 28, where in the first creation, not only was Adam, and we've seen this in apocalyptic texts, not only was Adam to function as a priest, so in one sense, the priestly activity of the people here in the Garden of Eden also reflects Adam's priestly activity in Genesis 1 and 2. We've suggested that in the apocalyptic text in Ezekiel 28, Adam is portrayed as a priest in the Garden of Eden. So, the priestly activity here is the ultimate fulfillment of God's intention for Adam and Eve to function as priests in the Garden. But also, in light of, even more specifically and explicitly in light of Genesis chapter 1, Genesis chapter 1 and 26 through 28, a text that most of us recall, but actually, I'll start with verse 26 and read through 27, and I'll stop there.

Yeah, I'll read 28 as well, I think. So, 26 through 28, God creates Adam and Eve, and it says, so God created, verse 26, then God said, let us make man in our own image and likeness and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air over the livestock and over all of the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So, God created man in his own image; in the image of God, he created them, male and female, God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish of the sea, birds of the air, over every living creature.

So, they're to fill the earth, and rule over the earth, and subdue the earth as God's image bearers. I think here we find the final fulfillment of what God intended for Adam, that is to rule over creation; now you find God's people fulfilling the mandate given to Adam of ruling over creation, now they rule over the new creation, in fulfillment of Genesis 1, 26 through 28. So, John's vision ends with God's people living in a new creation, the Garden of Eden, with God and the Lamb dwelling in their midst, with God's temple presence suffusing the entire creation, fulfilling the intention of the original New Jerusalem and Temple, so that now the goal of God's redemptive-historical plan has finally been reached.

Notice too, one could summarize this by noting all the new features that are fulfillment of Old Testament text we find the new creation, we're introduced to a New Jerusalem, the New Covenant gets fulfilled, we find the new people of God, a New Temple and salvation in terms of a New Exodus. So, to put this vision in its context, what is the overall function of this vision? First of all, clearly, this is meant to contrast with the prostitute Babylon. Back in chapter 18, verse 4, God's people were called to leave, come out of her, leave Babylon, the prostitute Babylon, and we said that's not so much physically, which would be impossible, but instead it means to separate oneself from their values, to refuse to participate in the idolatrous godless practices of Rome.

The idea is not physical separation, we'll see that, I think John assumes that his people are going to remain, and in fact, in chapters 2 and 3, he calls on them to be a faithful witness, they can't do that if they remove themselves physically. So, it's more separating themselves from the ideology of Rome, from their godless idolatrous practices, from worshipping the emperor and worshipping foreign gods and worshipping the beast, but if they are to leave the prostitute Babylon, which is Rome, they must have somewhere to go, and that now takes place in 21 and 22 in the New Jerusalem. If they leave one city, they need another city to go to, and now 21 and 22 present the alternative that God's people can now enter.

Second, the New Jerusalem vision also functions to engender faithfulness in God's people. So, it's not primarily meant to just predict a future event and to show us exactly what the new creation is going to look like and what we're going to be doing and what everything is, you know, what's going to be there and who's going to be there. It's not meant to answer those kinds of questions.

It provides the promise and reward for those who maintain their faithful witness. It's meant to motivate the churches in chapters 2 and 3 to holiness and purity in the present. And so, it's the promise and reward for those who overcome in chapters 2 and 3. We've already suggested that all the promises to the overcomer in the messages in 2 and 3, most of them have links to chapters 21 and 22.

And then, finally, in that God's people are already a kingdom of priests, the people of God should already be modeling and witnessing to the life of the new creation in the present. So, I think what John is doing is not only presenting this as a future hope, which it is, the future reward and motivation, but because where his people will function as kings and priests in 22, 1 through 5, but chapter 1 and chapter 5, because they are already God's kings and priests, they should be witnessing to and testifying already to the life of the new creation. Now, having come to the very end of John's vision, chapter 22, verses 6 through 21, ends with, I think, a series of sayings that it's very difficult to tell at times who is saying what.

There are a couple of statements that I think are clearly Jesus Christ. There are others who may be an angel. There are others that may be John himself speaking.

But it's hard to sort out the voices in 22;6 and following. But I think what's going on overall, before I look at just a couple of details, what I think is going on overall is that this is now a further series of exhortations as to how the readers are to respond to the book. And basically what it is, it's a further call to holiness and obedience and faithful witness on the part of the church.

So, we said 22:5 sort of ends the vision proper, but it's now as if the reader is kind of brought back to earth, we might say, to now live out the reality of the book of Revelation. And so, 22, 6 to the end could sort of be seen in analogy or almost as a

bookend with chapter 1, verses 1 through 3 that tells us about the nature of the book and how we're supposed to respond. Now, at the other end of the book, we have more, having seen the whole vision, now it's expanded to tell us in more detail how we are to respond and how we are to live out the reality of Revelation 4 through 22.

One author said, and I think he's right, Revelation is not a script of the end times, it's a script of the church. It's a script for how we are to live out life now in the present. And 22:6 to the end of the chapter would certainly affirm that.

For example, just to highlight a couple of features of this, John says in a scene resembling chapter 19 at the end of the Babylon prostitute image vision where John is tempted to bow down and worship the angel. Once more, in verses 9 and 10, John is 8 and 9. Actually, John is tempted to bow down to worship an angel, and the angel says, do not do it; I'm only a servant; instead, worship God. Now, what is important here, I think, is not only, as we said earlier, interestingly, in the context of a monotheistic vision where only God is to be worshipped, Jesus Christ is also an object of worship, but perhaps this is a reminder of the correct response of the vision.

John is not to be infatuated with the angel and the vision that he saw, but instead, it should lead him to worship God. And so right at the beginning, this is a call for the response to this vision; it should be nothing less than worshipping God himself; I think as John is calling his church, how John is calling his churches to respond. The other feature in verse 11 that is sort of interesting, verse 11, John is told, don't seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, and sealing up is an image for not divulging its content, not revealing it, because it's for a future time, and this language comes out of Daniel chapter 12 verse 10, where Daniel is told to seal up the vision.

Now John is told not to, why? Because it is directly relevant to his readers, they cannot afford to simply see this as something for the future. Instead, this is a message relevant to the readers that John is not to seal it up because the time is near, the fulfillment is already at hand, Revelation is addressing their situation. Furthermore, John has this interesting statement in verse 11, let him who does wrong continue to do wrong, let him who is vile continue to be vile, but let him who is right continue to do right, and let him who is holy continue to be holy, supporting the response of holiness. In other words, the vision of Revelation should engender righteousness and holiness.

But this language is kind of interesting in verse 11; what is John calling for? John has portrayed the church as a faithful witness or portrays the church as requiring of it to be a faithful witness even in the face of opposition, but then here he seems to refute that by saying, anyone who does wrong, let them continue to do wrong. It is almost as if John has now resigned himself to fate, that people who do wrong are just going to do wrong, and people who do right will continue to do that, and the judgment will

sort that out at the end. But instead, I wonder if the way to take this is to see it more as a reflection of the response of the readers or the response of the world to not only this book, but to the witness of the church.

Some will harden themselves and refuse to repent, others though will respond. God's people will respond with faithfulness. The true people of God will respond in faithfulness, obedience, and holiness, whereas for others, Revelation will bring about a response of hardening themselves.

This may be similar to Jesus' own teaching with his parables. As Jesus says a couple of times, the parables, on one hand, function to harden those who rebelled and those who refused to obey. It functioned to harden them, whereas those who had ears to hear, a phrase that John uses several times, the one who has an ear to hear, let him hear.

Those who have ears to hear God's word will respond in holiness and obedience. Those who are dull of hearing, those who are rebellious, it will function to harden them, and they will continue in their disobedience. A couple of other texts, first of all, verse 17 is difficult as well, as far as sorting out who is doing what.

The spirit and the bride say, come, and let him who hears say, come. Whoever is thirsty, let him come, and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. Usually, this has been seen as sort of an evangelistic call, that is, the coming would be the coming of the non-saved, and those who come to take the free gift of water would be the unsaved, the unbelievers, who now respond to the message of the gospel and find salvation.

However, I think the first two, comes, the spirit and the bride say, come, and let him who hears say, come, should be understood as more of a request or a prayer for Jesus himself to come. Notice verse 7 that begins this: behold, I am coming soon, then blessed who keeps the words of the book of his prophecy. Again, blessed is the one who keeps the words, showing us once again that the response to this book is one of obedience and holiness.

So notice every book we've looked at so far has engendered worship, back in verses 8 and 9, and now faithfulness and righteousness. Now, skipping ahead then, in verse 17, the spirit and the bride say, come, and let him who hears say, come. That is, in response to Jesus' words in verse 7, behold, I am coming, now the bride and the one who hears, probably the one who has ears, let him hear, now respond by saying, come, Lord Jesus, which is how the book ends.

Amen, come Lord Jesus. So I see the word come here, not as a call for unbelievers to come, but as a call or a prayer or a request for Jesus Christ to come, just as he

promised, I am coming soon. And then, whoever is thirsty, let him come, and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

Probably again, not so much a call to respond in faith of the gospel, an evangelistic call, but should be understood in light of chapter 21 and verse 6, to him who is thirsty, I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. This is the promise, an eschatological promise for the people of God. So, the one who wishes to come would be the people of God invited to come and participate in final salvation.

The final text that I want to draw attention to is verses 18 and 19, which I want to demonstrate to you, and it is also to be understood as an exhortation, an ethical response on the part of the readers. That is, verses 18 and 19 are a call to obedience and faithfulness. Let me read this section, verses 18 and 19.

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the Tree of Life and in the holy city, Revelation 21 and 22, which are described in this book. The plagues in verse 18 would be the trumpets, bowls, seals, and perhaps the end time judgment.

Now, how do we understand this text? This language of anyone who adds and subtracts will be guilty of the plagues, or anyone who adds or subtracts will not participate in the eschatological salvation in the inheritance or award of Revelation 21 and 22. Usually, these two verses are usually taken in two different ways. Number one, they are a warning to later scribes and later readers and interpreters of Revelation not to tamper with it by adding words or deleting words by writing further paragraphs or sections or deleting certain parts that one does not like.

Many take it that way. A second way to take it is to see this as a warning against unbelievers, especially cults and other religions that would add books to the Bible. Some see it significant that this occurs at the very end of the Bible, and they would see it as encompassing the whole canon.

So, this is a warning for other cults and religions and teachings that would try to add their own writings and their own books, their own sayings to the Bible, or taking books out of the Bible, removing certain books, or something like that. So, this is often seen as a sort of a bibliological statement about the authority of Scripture and not tampering with it, not deleting from it, not adding anything, that it is the authoritative word of God, and it is sufficient as it stands. And I certainly would not quibble and argue with that.

I would agree with that, but I'm not sure that's what these verses are doing in this context. First of all, as we've noted already, starting in verse 7, everything is in the

context of exhortation. Jesus says, I'm coming soon in verse 7; blessed are the ones who keep the words of this prophecy.

And then John, sort of embodying the response he wants from his readers, is told by the angel, don't worship me, worship God, which should be the proper response to the book. Verses 10 and 11, this is a prophecy for the present; don't seal it up, it's for the people of God now. And the one who is righteous continues to do righteous; the one who is holy continues to be holy.

Verses 14 and following, blessed is the one who is pure; they will receive the tree of life. So this is exhortation. Now, verses 18 through 19, I think, continue the exhortation of motivating God's people to faithfulness, holiness, and obedience.

Now, why do I say that? First of all, notice that these verses are an allusion to, once more, as we've seen happen so often through Revelation, an allusion back to the Old Testament. You find this same language back in Deuteronomy in relationship to the Old Testament law. So, for example, Deuteronomy chapter 4, as the nation is reminded not to forsake the law, not to neglect it.

And the author says, this is chapter 4 and verse 2, I'll read verse 1. Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws that I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land the Lord God has given and your fathers have given you. This is interesting. One of the things in Revelation chapter 22, verse 19, is that if they add or take away, they will not receive the Tree of Life and the holy city.

That is the new creation, their inheritance, the land. But now, verse 2 says, do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands that the Lord your God has given you. In Deuteronomy chapter 12 and verse 32, we find something similar.

In 12 verse 32, towards the very end, the author says, I'll read verse 31, you must not worship the Lord your God in that way, because in worshipping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things that the Lord hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire and sacrifice to the gods. See that you do all I command; do not add to it or take away.

Interestingly, too, that one is in the context of not worshipping idols and other gods as the nations do. So, the first thing to note is John has drawn on language that comes out of the book of Deuteronomy, and in both of those contexts, the statements to do not add or take away were in the context of keeping the law, doing everything that it says. So, even back in Deuteronomy, the idea of taking away and adding was not just adding more words or taking away; it had to do with making sure you obey it and keep it.

Second, I want you to know to whom this is addressed. Verses 18 and 19 are addressed to warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. Who is the person who hears the words of the prophecy of this book? Go back to chapters 1, 2, and 3. It is the church.

Chapter 1 and verse 3, blessed is the one who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy of this book and who keep it. So, the one who hears the words of the prophecy would be those in the churches, the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 or our churches today. In other words, this is addressing the churches or believers.

And here they are warned that when they hear the words of the prophecy of this book, do not neglect it, but instead keep it. So, this is not addressed to later scribes who would tamper with the book. This is not addressed to unbelievers and what they might do with the book.

This is not addressed to cults and false religions. This is addressed to the church. Furthermore, what that means is that I think we should see this text as the bookend along with chapter 1 verse 3. 1 verse 3 pronounces a blessing on the one who hears the word of God and obeys it.

Now, we find a cursing for the one who hears the word of God and refuses to keep it. In other words, what does it mean to add and take away? I think this is metaphorical for disobeying the word of God and refusing to keep it, especially by compromising with the idolatrous pagan world. The same thing that Israel was warned against back in Deuteronomy chapter 32.

Now, John is warning his churches in chapters 2 and 3 that when they hear the book read, the only proper response is one of worship, one of obedience, one of righteousness, one of holiness, one of in light of the soon expectation of the return of Jesus Christ, to respond in faithfulness and obedience, to refuse to respond in obedience, to substitute and add idols, to take away from God's word by neglecting it and refusing to obey it. That's what it means to add and subtract from the word of God. So, this is not a call for other cults and religions not to add words.

The idea here is not whether you write new sentences or paragraphs, which I would agree you shouldn't. This is an ethical call. This is a call for obedience and faithfulness to refuse to participate in the pagan, idolatrous empire of Rome for the first readers.

The last thing I want to mention about the book of Revelation itself, and then I want to end with just a handful of comments as to how we read it. Notice the language that you find several times here. Starting in verse 7, Jesus says, Behold, I am coming soon.

Verse 12, Behold, I am coming soon. And then, in verse 20, Yes, I am coming soon. Probably all words spoken by Jesus himself.

How do we understand that soonness? Well, some have translated it, I am coming quickly. And the idea would be more the speed with which he comes, not that it's going to happen very soon. For example, in the lifetime of the readers, some have suggested that John was wrong.

Jesus did not come back soon. I think, though, the way to look at this is that we should interpret this from the standpoint that this reflects simply the expectation of the soon return of Christ by the church. All throughout the centuries, the church has always expected that Christ could come back at any time.

Though we have no idea when that's going to be, the soon return of Christ, that he could come back at any time, which was true. In fact, the fact that he had already come the first time to inaugurate his salvation and kingdom meant that he could come back at any time to wrap that up and bring that to its consummation. So I think the soon here should be understood with its full force.

Christ is coming soon. But the idea is the church has always expected the soon return of Christ, although we simply don't know when that is going to occur. That is reflected here in these sayings.

But again, the soonness of the return of Christ is what adds urgency to the ethical appeal of this last section, to worship God alone, to faithfulness, to holiness, to righteousness, to making sure that we keep and obey the words of the book of Revelation by refusing to compromise with the pagan idolatrous world. And so ends the book of Revelation. And fittingly, it ends with, Amen, come Lord Jesus.

And I think the appropriate response at the end of the day to Revelation would be for everyone to chime in and say, Amen, come, Lord Jesus. And as we wait for that, we live lives of holiness and purity and righteousness. We refuse to be influenced by, and we refuse to participate in the idolatrous, godless, oppressive evil practices and system and values that characterize not only the Roman Empire but also cultures and nations in our world today.

Now, I want to end by raising the question just briefly in the next few minutes: how should we read the book of Revelation? At the very beginning of this series of lectures on Revelation, we said that a very popular way of interpreting Revelation is to see it as something to be read in light of our modern days. That we should draw connections between the visions and language of Revelation and modern-day, now 21st century, modern-day events and persons and nations and people and technologies. So, as many have characterized in the past, it's like reading with a book

of Revelation, the Bible open to Revelation in one hand and reading the morning newspaper in the other hand.

The idea is we draw immediate connections and we see John is actually predicting what's going on in our own day. We have the key to reading it. Usually what that means then is we try to plot our existence and see how close we are to the end.

And sometimes, that even results in blatant predictions of when Christ is going to come back. They all have one thing in common. They've all failed.

If this is not the proper way to read Revelation, how should we read it? Let me suggest five things. First of all, it's just a little bit different from the others. But first of all, Revelation does suggest that history is moving towards a goal and that God is the one who will bring it to its consummation.

So it won't come through human effort. Revelation is not a vision for what our present culture and our society can become, although it could do that. But that's not the primary intent of it.

Revelation is not just a vision, especially in the latter chapters of the New Jerusalem. It's not just a vision to give us hope for our present society and our present day. No, it gives us hope for the future.

It reminds us that God is moving history somewhere. God is going to bring history to a close. He himself will intervene and he will set the world right.

Through his judgment and salvation, God is going to bring history to its close. So, Revelation, we cannot let go of the telic sense of Revelation, that it has a goal, that our world is moving somewhere, and God is the one. God is the Alpha and the Omega, the one standing at the beginning of that process and the one who stands at the end, who will bring it to its goal.

Our hope is the future coming of Jesus Christ to consummate God's plan for history through judgment and salvation and to set this world right. That is the hope of God's people. But second, the next four that I want to emphasize, I think also come out clearly out of the book of Revelation and that is first or number two, Revelation is a call to worship and allegiance.

That is Revelation; we should read it as a call to worship and allegiance. Chapters 4 and 5 begin the book at the very beginning of John's visions with an image in chapters 4 and 5 that reminds us that only God and the Lamb are worthy of worship. To worship anything else, any other person, any other material possessions, any other culture, any other nation, to any other government, to worship anything else, to give our allegiance to anything else is idolatry.

Revelation is a call for us to discern the dangers of idolatry in our own world and in our own lives and to give exclusive allegiance to God and the Lamb. Revelation is a call for us in a world that resists God, in a world that refuses to acknowledge its sovereignty, Revelation is a call for God's people to join in heaven and worship and acknowledge the sovereignty of the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the one who is and was and who is to come. We should read Revelation as a call to worship and allegiance to God and the Lamb and to recognize that to give that worship and allegiance to anything else is nothing less than idolatry.

Number three, we should also read Revelation as a call to witness and mission. Note how many times the church is described or people throughout the book are described as those who maintain their faithful witness and the word of the testimony of Jesus Christ. That is, the church, Revelation, is a call for the church to engage in witness.

We are to witness the life of the new creation. We are to witness the reality of God and his salvation he has provided through Jesus Christ. Through our worship, we are to witness the reality of who God is and what he has done for his people through the person of Jesus Christ.

The fact that we are already a kingdom of priests, the fact that Jesus Christ, through his death has already created his church as a kingdom of priests means that we are to witness the reality of an alternative world, a new creation characterized by justice and faithfulness and love and righteousness, a place where perfect worship takes place, a place where perfect activity and meaningful life emerges only in the new creation. But that should now be represented, that should now be witnessed to by the kingdom of priests that God has already created through his son Jesus Christ. The reality of the new creation should already be evident in our lives.

We should be testifying to and witnessing to the life of the new creation. So, in that sense, Revelation is a call for mission and witness on the part of God's people, the church. Fourth, we should read Revelation as a call to discernment and resistance.

That is, because of the deceptive nature of sin, because of the deceptive nature of Satan and his attempts to thwart God's purposes and his people and to lead us astray, it requires discernment, it requires insight. And Revelation provides us with that insight. We need insight to determine where Babylon is present in our own day and age.

We need insight and discernment to determine where there is injustice, where there is idolatry, where there is godlessness, where there is violence and harm. We need insight and discernment to see where that is present in our own lives, in our own cultures, our own nations, our own countries, and our own governments. We need

insight and then we need to resist that and stand up against that, not through violence, but through faithful witness to the Lamb Jesus Christ and faithful witness to the reality of the new creation.

As in true apocalyptic fashion, we've seen Revelation expose godlessness. It exposes and unveils idolatry and oppressive nations and empires, but it also provides an alternative perspective. And we need insight and discernment and the ability to resist through our faithful witness wherever Babylon is.

One of my colleagues once said Babylon is humanity's attempt to set up paradise while leaving God completely out of the picture. It requires discernment and insight to determine where that is in our own life and our own day and age, as well as to stand up and resist that. But it also calls for us to root that out in our own lives.

We start with ourselves and realize where we, in a sense, have climbed into bed with Babylon unwittingly. Fifth and finally, we should read Revelation as a call for obedience and discipleship. God's people are those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

We just looked at the very last verses, chapter 22, verses 6 to the end of the book, which is a call to holiness and faithfulness on the part of God's people. God's people are those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. Revelation is a call for unqualified obedience and discipleship to the person of Jesus Christ, no matter what the consequences it brings.

So, if Revelation does not evoke at least those five responses in us when we read it, we probably have not heeded the call to have ears to hear the book of Revelation.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is the final session 30, Revelation 22, New Jerusalem, and How to Read the Book of Revelation.