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The River

1.) The Picture (v.1)

As we look at the continuation of the tour of the New Jerusalem, it appears that we move from the exterior description into the interior. And it appears that the closer we get to the center, the less this place resembles a city as we think of one and more like a garden.

It is here that many begin to look for parallels between the Edenic paradise and this eternal kingdom. John's angelic tour guide next **showed him a river of the water of life**. With no sea in the eternal state (21:1), there could be no hydrologic cycle, and hence no rain to fill a river. Thus, the **water of life** is not water as we know it; it is a symbol of eternal life (cf. Isa. 12:3; John 4:13–14; 7:38). Like everything else in the New Jerusalem, the **river was clear as crystal** so it could reflect the glory of God. It cascaded down **from the throne of God and of the Lamb** in a dazzling, sparkling, never-ending stream. Its pure, unpolluted, unobstructed flow symbolizes the constant flow of everlasting life from God's throne to God's people.¹

The essential meaning of this river is found in Jesus' declaration to the woman at the well of Sychar: "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). The river, flowing as it does from God's throne, can only portray that eternal life is entirely due to God's gracious gift.²

Most commentators are emphatic that the river of life is meant to be taken in symbolic terms. A few suggest a partial literal translation. If it is a literal river, then the descriptions we have Scripturally would require that it is a supernaturally supplied and sustained source that likely operates in a means that we are currently unaware of.

2.) The Proximity (v.2)

The exact city architecture that John described is unclear. Does **the great street of the city** divide so that it reaches each of the twelve gates (21:21)? Does the river flow **down the middle** of the streets like a great canal, branching into subcanals like Venice? Or is it better to understand the river as beside the street? Is **the tree of life** one single great plant, or should we take "tree" collectively in the sense of "orchard," with individual plants standing **on each side of the river**? We are unable to answer these questions, so we should not speculate.³

The tree of life spreads all along the great street of the city (v. 2). What was once forfeited by our forebears in Eden and denied to their succeeding posterity is now fully restored (cf. Gen 3:22–24). In Ezekiel's vision these are multiple trees on each side of the river that bear fruit monthly whose leaves are for healing (Ezek 47:12). Therefore, the tree (*xylon*) John speaks of may be a collective word for Ezekiel's trees. So abundant is its vitality that it bears a crop of fruit each month. Its leaves produce healing for the nations. The imagery of abundant fruit and medicinal leaves should be understood as symbolic of the far-reaching effects of the death of Christ in the redeemed community the Holy City. So powerful is the salvation of God that the effects of sin are completely overcome. The eternal life God gives the redeemed community will be perpetually available, will sustain, and will cure eternally every former sin.⁴

The phrase **in the middle of its street** is best translated "in the middle of its path" and connected with the following phrase **on either side of the river was the tree of life**. The **tree of life** is the celestial counterpart to the tree of life in Eden (Gen. 2:9; 3:22–24), and this tree provides for those who are

¹ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2000). [Revelation 12–22](#) (p. 286). Moody Press.

² Easley, K. H. (1998). [Revelation](#) (Vol. 12, p. 414). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

³ Easley, K. H. (1998). [Revelation](#) (Vol. 12, pp. 414–415). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁴ Johnson, A. F. (1981). [Revelation](#). In F. E. Gaebelien (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation* (Vol. 12, p. 599). Zondervan Publishing House.

immortal. The **tree of life** was a familiar Jewish concept that expressed blessing (cf. 2:7; Prov. 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4), and the celestial tree symbolizes the blessing of eternal life. That the **tree** bears **twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month** emphasizes the infinite variety that will fill heaven. The use of the term **month** does not refer to time, since this is the eternal state and time is no more. It is an anthropomorphic expression of the joyous provision of eternity couched in the familiar terms of time. Then John makes the intriguing observation that **the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations**. At first glance, that seems confusing, since obviously there will be no illness or injury in heaven that would require **healing**. *Therapeia* (**healing**), however, does not imply illness. Perhaps a better way to translate it would be “life-giving,” “health-giving,” or “therapeutic.” The **leaves of the tree** can be likened to supernatural vitamins, since vitamins are taken not to treat illness, but to promote general health. Life in heaven will be fully energized, rich, and exciting.

The text does not say whether the saints will actually eat the **leaves of the tree**, though that is possible. Angels ate food with Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18:1–8), as did the Lord Jesus Christ with His disciples after His resurrection (Luke 24:42–43; Acts 10:41). It is conceivable that the saints in heaven will eat, not out of necessity, but for enjoyment.⁵

3.) The Perfection (v.3)

On one hand, verse three suggests yet another consistency with the original Paradise. It is free of the curse. It is free of the effects on the creation. It is free of people that are cursed or have done cursed things.

But on the other hand, this picture supersedes that of the original creation. While God walked with Adam and Eve, we don’t see evidence that the throne of God was physically present in their midst. The garden of Eden had its river and its tree, but it did not contain **the throne of God and of the Lamb**. For this reason the city surpasses the original paradise. The throne equally belongs to the Father and the Son—God and the Lamb. Further, the garden had been the place where the curse entered (Gen. 3:14, 17). Now, the city is the place where **no longer will there be any more curse**. Here at last is the seventh and greatest of the seven things that will no longer exist in eternity (sea, death, mourning, crying, pain, and night are the others; 21:1, 4, 25). Where the curse has been banished, only blessing remains. Three of the greatest specific blessings of eternity now follow.

His servants will serve him. The word *servants* can be rendered “slaves,” and the verb *serve* usually means religious worship. Eternity will never be boring. We cannot imagine exactly what it will mean for us to serve and worship God throughout eternity or even that he would desire such. The implication, however, is of great activity, not passive lethargy. In this life, his servants truly served him, though sometimes halfheartedly and often with incomplete obedience. In eternity this will change to perfect service. The first blessing is *faultless active usefulness*.⁶

As John toured the New Jerusalem, he couldn’t help but notice that life was very different for its inhabitants. The most dramatic change from the present earth is **that there will no longer be any curse**. As noted in the discussion of 21:4 in chapter 18 of this volume, the removal of the curse will mean the end forever of sorrow, pain, and especially death—the most terrible aspect of the curse (Gen. 2:17). Though, as previously noted, there will be no temple in the New Jerusalem, **the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it** (cf. the detailed description of the throne scene in 4:2–11). **God** the Father and the **Lamb**, the Lord Jesus Christ, will reign throughout eternity. Since God will continue forever as heaven’s sovereign ruler, **His bond-servants will serve Him forever** (cf. 7:15). They will spend all eternity carrying

⁵ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2000). *Revelation 12–22* (p. 287). Moody Press.

⁶ Easley, K. H. (1998). *Revelation* (Vol. 12, pp. 415–416). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

out the infinite variety of tasks that the limitless mind of God can conceive. Incredibly, as the parable in Luke 12:35–40 indicates, the Lord will also serve them.⁷

4.) The Perception (v.4)

With no restriction such as those that pertain to Moses (Exod 33:20, 23) or the high priests (Heb 9:7), the redeemed community will be in Christ's presence, beholding perpetually his glory (cf. Ps 17:15; Matt 5:8; 1 Cor 13:12. 2 Cor 3:18; 1 John 3:2). Eternal life is perfect communion, worship, the vision of God, light, and victory. Since God and the Lamb are always viewed together, there is no point in saying that the redeemed will see Jesus but not the Father. (Concerning the name on their foreheads, see comments at 14:1.)⁸

They will see his face. One of the truths embedded almost from the beginning of biblical revelation is that no human can see God face-to-face. Moses' experience with the Lord was the model: "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Exod. 33:20). Further, the Lord said to Moses, "You will see my back; but my face must not be seen" (Exod. 33:23). In the Christian era, God's face is glimpsed through Christ. Sometimes, however, the way seems dark, and God's face has appeared hidden even to the greatest of saints. In eternity with the curse removed, all God's servants will see him face-to-face. Again, we cannot begin to imagine what this means, only that it surpasses the most wonderful spiritual experience of God that anyone in this life can have. The second blessing is *immediate divine presence*.⁹

His name will be on their foreheads. Throughout Revelation, foreheads with a sign or a mark have figured prominently (7:3; 9:4; 13:16; 14:1, 9; 17:5; 20:4; 22:4). The only group so far specifically noted with the *name* of God on their foreheads were the 144,000 followers of the Lamb (14:1). To bear God's name was a privilege, but it also provided protection. Although interpreters have often differed about the meaning of the 144,000, all agree that in the present text all the redeemed throughout eternity are in view. The seal or name of God on someone authenticates that person as genuine, guarantees God's protection, and is a token of his reward to the overcomers. The third blessing is *eternally guaranteed reward*.¹⁰

5.) The Provision (v.5)

A final burst of light engulfs the whole scene, and an announcement that the saints will reign for ever and ever fulfills the first promise of the book (1:6; cf. 5:10; 20:4–6; and see esp. 11:15). The logical sequence as well as the inner relationship of the words "his servants will serve" (v. 3) and "they will reign" (v. 5) have deep implications for the whole nature of God's kingdom in contrast to that of the satanic Babylon. Surely it is fitting for such a book of prophecy as Revelation to close around the throne, with God's servants both worshipping and ruling.¹¹

This verse concludes the vision at the highest possible level. It repeats and summarizes the teaching of Revelation 21:22–24. **No more night** pictures the complete end of all the darkness that sin and evil brought. This can happen only because of the direct personal presence of **the Lord God** who will **give them light**. Just as Jesus is the "Light of the World" during the present age (John 8:12; 9:5), so in eternity

⁷ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2000). *Revelation 12–22* (pp. 287–288). Moody Press.

⁸ Johnson, A. F. (1981). *Revelation*. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation* (Vol. 12, pp. 599–600). Zondervan Publishing House.

⁹ Easley, K. H. (1998). *Revelation* (Vol. 12, p. 416). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹⁰ Easley, K. H. (1998). *Revelation* (Vol. 12, p. 416). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹¹ Johnson, A. F. (1981). *Revelation*. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation* (Vol. 12, p. 600). Zondervan Publishing House.

he is the everlasting light. So neither **the light of a lamp** (to illumine the night) or **the light of the sun** (to illumine the day) can add anything to the light of God's presence.

The concluding promise is that the city's citizens **will reign for ever and ever**. Exactly what this means is not clear, but it is evidently part of their service to God. One of the promises Christ made to the overcomers early in Revelation was that they will share his rule (2:27; 5:10). In Revelation 11:15, "The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.' " The final words of the last vision of Revelation show this as fully accomplished—but he fulfills it by sharing his rule with his servants.¹²

The Reliability

The glory now fades. John is back on Patmos. Little more does he see, but several voices speak. They do not follow any observable pattern, and sometimes it is hard to determine exactly who is speaking. The voices of first part of the epilogue focus on the truthfulness of the message. They begin with the guiding angel and then move on to John and then to Jesus himself.¹³

1.) The Certainty (v.6)

The angel's words reinforce an important truth: Everything John has seen in Revelation will come to pass. What the inspired apostle has written is not mystical; the Apocalypse is not a record of his bizarre dreams or the result of an overactive imagination. It is not an allegory from which readers can extract hidden meanings of their own concoction. It is an accurate description of events and persons yet to come.¹⁴

For we are slow to believe that God is as good as He is. The news seems to us, habituated as we are to the misery of this fallen world, too good to be true [Nangle]. They are no dreams of a visionary, but the realities of God's sure word.¹⁵

2.) The Commendation (v.7)

Without notice, the speaker changes from the angel to Christ. As far as we can determine, John only hears rather than sees Christ this time. There is no vision, perhaps because Christ wanted the final visual portrait of himself in Revelation to be the glorious image that "the Lamb is its lamp" (21:24). Christ is the second oral witness, in as many verses, to the **soon** fulfillment of the book. This is the first of three times in the epilogue that Jesus himself announces his return (vv. 7, 12, 20). The repetition emphasizes the solemn urgency of Christ's promise.¹⁶

Christ follows his promise immediately with a pronouncement of blessing, the sixth "beatitude" found in Revelation. The first such blessing who is for those who read or heard the prophecy (1:3). This one is similar, with a blessing for the one **who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book**. Here is further evidence that Revelation is better understood along the lines of prophecy ("thus saith the Lord!") than as mysterious apocalyptic. There is much in the book for God's people to keep and obey All the challenges to overcome and be faithful to the Lamb—to the point of death, if necessary—are parts of the prophecy

¹² Easley, K. H. (1998). [Revelation](#) (Vol. 12, pp. 416–417). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹³ Easley, K. H. (1998). [Revelation](#) (Vol. 12, p. 417). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹⁴ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2000). [Revelation 12–22](#) (p. 292). Moody Press.

¹⁵ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). [Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible](#) (Vol. 2, p. 603). Logos Research Systems, Inc.

¹⁶ Easley, K. H. (1998). [Revelation](#) (Vol. 12, pp. 417–418). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

that every Christian may keep. No matter how we interpret various disputed aspects of Revelation, at the heart of the book are commands to keep.¹⁷

The question arises as to what **words** in Revelation believers are called to heed. Before this command, there are no specific commands addressed to Christians in the portion of the Apocalypse covering future events (chaps. 4–22), though there are some addressed to the seven churches (chaps. 2–3). What does it mean, then, to heed the book of Revelation? It is a general command to long for Christ's return and our eternal fellowship with Him. It calls on believers to desire heaven, to desire holiness, to desire to see Christ vindicated and triumphant over His enemies, to desire the end of the curse, and to desire the glories of Christ's earthly kingdom and the new heaven and the new earth. After reading Revelation, Christians should love Christ more, long to see Him vindicated in His glory, live in light of the reality that they will one day see Him, disconnect themselves from the perishing world system, pursue heavenly realities, seek to be made like Christ, hope for their resurrection bodies, and anticipate their eternal rewards. They should also understand the fearful judgment that awaits non-Christians, and call those sinners to repentance and saving faith in the Lord Jesus.¹⁸

A view of what is to come should result in tangible action. It should be evidenced through obedient lifestyle.

3.) The Collapse (v.8)

The inspired apostle adds his testimony of the truthfulness of Revelation to that of the angel (v. 6), declaring **I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things**. Then, overcome by what he heard and saw, **John fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed him these things**. He had the proper response, worship, but being overwhelmed with amazement, John inadvertently directed it to the wrong object. The apostle knew that angels were not to be worshiped; in fact, he had earlier been rebuked for attempting to do so (19:10). But like Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:28), Daniel (Dan. 8:17; 10:9), and Peter, James, and he himself at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:6), John simply collapsed in wonder and worship.¹⁹

4.) The Correction (v.9)

Because God alone is to be worshiped (Ex. 34:14; Matt. 4:10), the angel **said to John, "Do not do that."** He hastily reminded the apostle that he, too, was a created being, declaring **I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book**. Far from being a legitimate object of worship for John, the angel was actually his created **fellow servant**, and not only his, but also of John's **brethren the prophets**, and of all believers, defined here as **those who heed the words of this book**. Throughout Scripture, angels are seen serving God's people. They were involved in giving the Law to Israel (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2) and are frequently seen protecting believers (cf. Ex. 23:20; 2 Chron. 32:21; Ps. 91:11; Dan. 3:28; 6:22; Acts 5:19; 12:7–11). Summing up the ministry of angels to believers, the author of Hebrews asks rhetorically, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?" (Heb. 1:14).

Calling the bewildered apostle back to the one and only object of worship, the angel commanded John to **worship God**. A proper understanding of Revelation should elicit worship; thus, worship is a major theme in the Apocalypse (cf. 4:8–11; 5:8–14; 7:9–12; 15:2–4; 19:1–6). As noted above, **God** alone is the only acceptable Person to worship. The Bible forbids the worship of anyone else, including angels, saints, the Virgin Mary, or any other created being (cf. Col. 2:18).²⁰

¹⁷ Easley, K. H. (1998). [Revelation](#) (Vol. 12, p. 418). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹⁸ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2000). [Revelation 12–22](#) (pp. 294–295). Moody Press.

¹⁹ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2000). [Revelation 12–22](#) (p. 296). Moody Press.

²⁰ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2000). [Revelation 12–22](#) (p. 296). Moody Press.

5.) The Communication (v.10)

But in Da 12:4, 9 (compare Da 8:26), the command is, “Seal the book,” for the vision shall be “for many days.” The fulfilment of Daniel’s prophecy was distant, that of John’s prophecy is near. The New Testament is the time of the end and fulfilment. The Gentile Church, for which John wrote his Revelation, needs more to be impressed with the shortness of the period, as it is inclined, owing to its Gentile origin, to conform to the world and forget the coming of the Lord. The Revelation points, on the one hand, to Christ’s coming as distant, for it shows the succession of the seven seals, trumpets, and vials; on the other hand, it proclaims, “Behold, I come quickly.” So Christ marked many events as about to intervene before His coming, and yet He also says “Behold, I come quickly,” because our right attitude is that of continual prayerful watching for His coming.²¹

6.) The Continuation (v.11)

But the truth it dramatically conveys is that people’s response to the proclamation of the truth will fix their eternal destinies. Those who hear the truth but continue to **do wrong** and **be filthy** will by that hardened response fix their eternal destiny in hell. On the other hand, the one who continues to practice **righteousness** and **keep himself holy** gives evidence of genuine saving faith. The adverb *eti* (**still**) may have the sense of “yet more.” In that case, the meaning is that those who do **wrong** and are **filthy** in this life will be even more so in eternal hell, where there will be absolutely no good influences to mitigate their evil. In contrast, those who are **righteous** and **holy** in this life will be perfectly holy in their glorified bodies in heaven.

It is sobering to realize that people’s response to God’s gospel truth in this life will determine their eternal destiny. When they die, or when the Lord returns, their character will be forever fixed. Those who respond to the warnings in Revelation will live forever in heaven. But those who fail to heed those warnings and repent will remain forever in their sinful state. It is also true that God’s Spirit will not always call sinners to repentance, and Scripture warns sinners not to harden their hearts to the point where God judicially abandons them (Ps. 95:7–8; Heb. 3:15; 4:7). Yet, tragically, those warnings often go unheeded, and the opportunity to repent and believe the gospel is wasted (cf. Matt. 25:1–13; Luke 13:24–25). Speaking of the wayward sinners of the northern kingdom (Israel), God declared, “Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone” (Hos. 4:17). Jesus said of the equally hardened Pharisees, “Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind” (Matt. 15:14; cf. Matt. 23:16, 24; Luke 6:39). Both of those passages express God’s wrath of abandonment (Rom. 1:18–32), when He turns hardened, unrepentant sinners over to the consequences of their own choices.

Preaching Revelation draws the line. Its truths will melt the hearts of the repentant and harden the hearts of the unrepentant. Those same truths thus become either an instrument of salvation, or an instrument of damnation (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18; 2 Cor. 2:15–16). They must be proclaimed so men and women can hear them while there is still time.²²

The Reward

1.) The Intention (v.12)

²¹ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). [*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 604). Logos Research Systems, Inc.

²² MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2000). [*Revelation 12–22*](#) (pp. 297–298). Moody Press.

This second of three announcements of the imminent return of Jesus in this chapter (cf. vv. 7, 20) is associated with the truth of rewards and judgment based on deeds.²³

When He comes, Jesus will bring His **reward ... with Him, to render to every man according to what he has done**. Believers' eternal rewards will be based on their faithfulness in serving Christ in this life. Their works will be tested, and only those with eternal value will survive (1 Cor. 3:9–15; 2 Cor. 5:9–10). The rewards believers enjoy in heaven will be capacities for serving God; the greater their faithfulness in this life, the greater will be their opportunity to serve in heaven (cf. Matt. 25:14–30). Knowing that, John exhorted believers, "Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward" (2 John 8).²⁴

2.) The Identity (v.13)

Each of these three titles has appeared as a divine name earlier in Revelation; here is the only time all three occur together. They are close synonyms and show that Christ transcends all times and all places. He is the source of all and the goal of all; therefore, he has the power to judge all.²⁵

3.) The Inheritance (v.14)

I like the NU text's variation. Instead of "do His Commandments" it reads "wash their robes."

NU-Text

These variations from the traditional text generally represent the Alexandrian or Egyptian type of text [the oldest, but sometimes questioned text]. They are found in the Critical Text published in the Twenty-sixth edition of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament (N) and in the United Bible Society's third edition (U), hence the acronym "NU-text."

In verse 7, the promise of Christ's near return was followed by a blessing; here an added blessing—the seventh beatitude—also follows his promise. This one is important, for it expands an idea mentioned in Scripture elsewhere only in Revelation 7:14: "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." There, the point was that only through the death of Christ the Lamb is salvation possible. That group had been limited to the Great Tribulation throng. Now, the blessing is expanded to include all the redeemed of all times, whether they belong to the end-time group or not.

One further point of interest is the verb *wash*, here (but not in 7:14) a present tense verb. Those who *keep* on washing their robes (confess their sins regularly) are the ones who demonstrate that they have already washed their robes initially in the Lamb's blood. This is identical to the point Jesus had made to Simon Peter on the night he washed the disciples' feet: "A person who has had a bath [that is, washed their robes and made them white at initial conversion] needs only to wash his feet [that is, washing the soiled spots off their robes]" (John 13:10; see also 1 John 1:9).

The blessings these redeemed people enjoy are spelled out in terms of John's final vision. They will be full citizens of New Jerusalem, **the city**, for their names are already entered in its citizenship registry, the Book of Life (21:27). Therefore, they have free and unhindered access. They **may go through the gates into the city** (21:25). Another way of describing this blessing is that they **have the right to the tree of life** (2:7; 22:2). In one sense, this blessing has already been realized, for in this life the redeemed already have begun to taste the benefits of eternal life (John 10:10), and "our citizenship is in heaven" already (Phil. 3:20). Already, we are to enjoy the rights that are ours because we are "washing our robes."²⁶

²³ Johnson, A. F. (1981). [Revelation](#). In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation* (Vol. 12, p. 601). Zondervan Publishing House.

²⁴ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2000). [Revelation 12–22](#) (p. 299). Moody Press.

²⁵ Easley, K. H. (1998). [Revelation](#) (Vol. 12, p. 420). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

²⁶ Easley, K. H. (1998). [Revelation](#) (Vol. 12, pp. 420–421). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

4.) The Isolation (v.15)

In Revelation 21:8 John's third vision had ended with a list of eight kinds of sinners to be cast into the fiery lake. Here, at the end of the book, is a similar roster, including several of the same sins from the previous list. Such pariahs can never live in the heavenly city. The portrait of hell as a fiery lake of burning sulfur in which the damned are tormented forever is terrifying. Equally horrible is the picture of spending eternity just outside the gates of the eternal city, knowing that inconceivable joys are inside, but the King has forever excluded those who have come under his just sentence. The outcasts include the following:

- **dogs**—a symbolic term for various impure persons; used in Scripture for male prostitutes as well as for those who distorted the gospel (Deut. 23:17–18; Phil. 3:2)
- **those who practice magic arts**—or “sorcerers”; the use of witchcraft, spells, and drugs to extend personal power and pleasure (9:21; 21:8)
- **sexually immoral**—or “fornicators”; always a violation of God's command because it violates the sacredness of marriage (9:21; 21:8)
- **murderers**—always condemned by God throughout Scripture as a violation of the sacredness of life (9:21; 21:8)
- **idolaters**—worshiping that which is not God violates the sovereignty of the Almighty (21:8)
- **everyone who loves and practices falsehood**—people like this have nothing to do with the truth; they have followed the devil, who is the great deceiver and liar (12:9)

It is not that these sins are so heinous that God will not or cannot forgive them. Rather, if a person's life is characterized by these sins, the person thereby indicates that he is unredeemed. One person might commit a murder, repent, and be saved; but if a person is a murderer, he is *not* saved.

People who live like this exclude themselves from heavenly citizenship. This solemn warning about those who will be barred from everlasting bliss is meant to encourage readers to examine their own lives. Each one who reads Revelation makes the choice whether to be among the blessed or among those forever outside.²⁷

5.) The Indication (v.16)

The Root and the Offspring of David expands a title found in Revelation 5:5, “the Root of David.” Now, however, Jesus is not only the source from which David sprang, but also the promised messianic descendant of David, the “shoot ... from the stump of Jesse” (Isa. 11:1). As the fulfillment of all the Old Testament messianic prophecies, Jesus now has provided fresh revelation to his people about the final consummation.

The bright Morning Star appears only when night is almost over. The fulfillment is at hand. Christians are to see in the first coming of Jesus the absolute guarantee that the fulfillment will occur exactly as he has promised (2 Pet. 1:19). Thus, the last title—except for “Lord Jesus” in verse 20—by which Christ names himself in Scripture is found uniquely here, and stands as a symbol of hope for all who have trusted him.²⁸

6.) The Invitation (v.17)

This verse is without question the most evangelistic text in the entire book. Ultimately, many wicked people will refuse to repent. In the end unrepentant sinners will be banished outside the city (v. 15). Now opportunity still remains for the world's people to come to Christ. The four invitations are addressed to the world, not the churches. (Some suggest that the first two “comes” are directed to Christ, requesting his Second Coming, but all four invitations are better understood as proclaimed to the world.)

²⁷ Easley, K. H. (1998). [Revelation](#) (Vol. 12, pp. 421–422). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

²⁸ Easley, K. H. (1998). [Revelation](#) (Vol. 12, p. 422). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

The **Spirit and the bride** are those who together make evangelism possible. The bride is the church, corporately and individually, witnessing about her Bridegroom through lifestyle and lips. The Spirit is certainly the Holy Spirit, who is responsible to “convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8). Without the bride’s witness the Spirit is voiceless; without the Spirit’s witness, the bride is powerless. Thus, together these two join in urging the world to **come** to salvation in Christ.

Only the one **who hears** the gospel and has responded in faith can summon others to share in that salvation. Thus, the second **come** stands to remind all who have heard the good news that they are responsible to invite others to Christ. The only person who can respond to the gospel is one **who is thirsty**—aware of a need for eternal life. Some have well noted that part of the task of evangelism is to make people spiritually thirsty. By God’s grace **whoever** becomes aware of a need is welcome: **let him come**. During his earthly ministry Jesus said, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him” (John 7:37–38).

This leads directly to the fourth invitation to **whoever wishes**. Although the language is of the River of Life to be found in New Jerusalem (5:1), one may now, at any time during earthly life, **take the free gift of the water of life** (Isa. 55:1). The glories of heaven will not be fully enjoyed until the consummation, yet every person who hears and comes to Jesus will begin enjoying heavenly benefits immediately.²⁹ There are two distinct invitations in this verse, delineated by the two exclamations, “**Come.**” The first part of the verse is a prayer addressed to Christ; the second part is an invitation addressed to sinners. The first part calls for Christ to come; the second part is the last call for sinners to come to faith in Christ.³⁰

The Restriction

The speaker who testifies to the authority and finality of **the words of the prophecy of this book** is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. v. 20). His solemn warning against tampering with Scripture applies first of all to the **prophecy of the book** of Revelation³¹

These verses should not be taken as a warning against adding anything to the Bible. Early interpreters understood them as a warning to false prophets not to alter the sense of John’s prophecy—i. e., Revelation (so Irenaeus *Contra Haereses* 30.2).³²

Verses 18–19 are a strong warning against any who would tamper with the contents of “this book” (Rev), either textually or in its moral and theological teaching (cf. 1 Cor 16:22). So severe is the danger he is warning against that John says that those who teach contrary to the message of Revelation will not only forfeit any right to salvation in the Holy City but will have visited on them the divine judgments (plagues) in Before concluding, John is compelled to insert a personal warning from himself as the one who penned **the words of the prophecy of this book**. It is not directed to future scribes who will be copying the book and might be careless in accidentally adding or deleting words. (In fact, this happened often down through the centuries.) Rather, the warning is for **everyone who hears**—the ones in the seven churches who will have the book read to them (1:3); by extension all hearers or readers down through the ages are included. The one who **adds to the prophecy of this book** or who **takes words away from**

²⁹ Easley, K. H. (1998). [Revelation](#) (Vol. 12, pp. 422–423). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

³⁰ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2000). [Revelation 12–22](#) (p. 303). Moody Press.

³¹ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2000). [Revelation 12–22](#) (p. 309). Moody Press.

³² Johnson, A. F. (1981). [Revelation](#). In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation* (Vol. 12, p. 602). Zondervan Publishing House.

this book of prophecy is the one who hears and then deliberately distorts the message of Revelation³³flicted on the beast worshipers.³⁴

- 1.) Supplementation Adds Suffering (v.18a)
- 2.) Subtraction Affects Salvation (v.19)

The Return

- 1.) The Affirmation (v.20a)

The book of Revelation and the Bible close with one final reminder and a benediction. In His last recorded words in Scripture the Lord Jesus Christ, **He who testifies to these things**, affirms **“Yes, I am coming quickly.”** His **coming** is imminent, just as Revelation (and the rest of the New Testament) teaches.³⁵

- 2.) The Anticipation (v.20b)

John speaks for all true believers when he responds, **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus**, since Christians are those “who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).³⁶

In most commentaries, this is reduced to a simple affirmation of the reality of Christ’s return. But I think that this third proclamation of the imminence of His return has John spun up. I think he can visualize the return of Christ on the horizon. I think that despite the difficulty that he witnessed, the glory of what is to come is so great that he is like an excited child pestering “are we there yet?”.

John agrees and anxiously anticipates that time when Christ returns.

- 3.) The Awareness (v.21)

The final words of the conclusion of his epistle/apocalypse/prophecy are made with both anticipation of the return of Christ and awareness of the grace and mercy that are going to be required for what is to come.

³³ Easley, K. H. (1998). [Revelation](#) (Vol. 12, p. 423). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

³⁴ Johnson, A. F. (1981). [Revelation](#). In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation* (Vol. 12, p. 603). Zondervan Publishing House.

³⁵ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2000). [Revelation 12–22](#) (pp. 311–312). Moody Press.

³⁶ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2000). [Revelation 12–22](#) (p. 312). Moody Press.