

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: Revelation Chapter 22: Some Notes

The last chapter of the Book of Revelation, and therefore the last chapter in our Bibles, is in some ways a little odd – partly because there does seem to be repetition of points already made (though that might be a desire to emphasise the point or points); but more because the Angel and Jesus seem to change places during the conversation (though that might be a deliberate reflection of John’s experience of the second hand message being taken up by the Jesus who sent the Messenger (Angel means Messenger)). As to this being a fitting end to the Bible: (a) John isn’t offering an ending, he is handing over to us the responsibility for taking up our own roles and writing our own stories; and (b) it is highly telling that the Bible begins with the Tree of Life being denied to Adam and Eve, because in that context they would be sinning eternally and eternally miserable, but ends with the Tree of Life there for all, with sin conquered.

Genesis and Revelation also have in common the concept of the Water of Life: the life-giving river. (Our hot dry Summer, with water shortages and clay soils cracking, might remind us of the significance of fresh water in hot dry countries.. and the natural connection between trees and water,) Genesis begins the Bible narration with God out of grace creating the universe, and us; and Revelation ends the Bible with the grace of God. How do you understand “All is grace”?

Those who think Chapter 22 is not deliberately “odd”, think that John might have left this last chapter un-edited, and the editor or editors not done a good job. Personally, edited or not, I think Chapter 22 does a very good job of presenting us with our marching orders. As to the distinction between Angel speaking and Jesus speaking, this ambivalence is very common in the Bible, and the messages (whether directly delivered or through an intermediary) are wholly consistent.

As always, John is writing his message as someone steeped in both the Old Testament and the between Testament books. The pictures he uses – twelve season fruit for example – are not original, though they are powerful. As always, John isn’t hunting for quotations. The Bible texts are there already in his head and in his heart.

Hopefully, you will get your own take-home message or messages from Chapter 22. Just three suggestions. 1) In condemning Angel worship as a poor substitute for God worship, and in his Alpha and Omega language, John makes it very clear that Jesus is Divine – on a par with God. 2) There is a great sense of urgency: Jesus is on His way. It may well be that John did think that the Second Coming was just round the corner, However, the more important point is about “suddenly” rather than “soon”. We have NOW, and that is the only time⁴ we are guaranteed. We need to make good use of NOW. 3) The crucial message is not just “Listen!”. It is “Listen and Act!” As Jesus says in the Gospels, there is little merit in being hearers of the Word, unless we go on to be doers of the Word.