CHAPTER 42: Revelation 19 thru 22 & Conclusion

We looked at the Rapture earlier in Revelation 4. John described it in the vision he had where he was transported into the portals of heaven. This was the Rapture from his point of view. It took place at the front end of the Tribulation. John was then shown a series of visions vividly portraying the terrible seven-year Tribulation Period (Revelation 6 thru 18). At the end of the Tribulation John sees a series of events that we will explore next. The first of these is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

People are often confused by the Rapture and the Second Coming. There are key differences that you need to be aware of. The Rapture occurs without anyone realizing what happened. People just disappear. Jesus actually talked about this. He said, **"Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one left. There will be two women grinding grain with a mill; one will be taken and one left."** (Matthew 24:40-41) The Rapture is God's way of removing all living saints from the earth prior to the Tribulation. When I talk about the "saints" I am referring to believers in Jesus. This is the biblical definition of a saint.

By contrast, the Second Coming is the visible return of Jesus down to the earth. **"Look! He is returning with the clouds, and every eye will see Him."** (Revelation 1:7). His glorious return is accompanied by the resurrection of the dead saints. Both the living and the dead saints of God will rise up to meet Jesus in mid-air. So then, the Rapture and the Second Coming are clearly two different events. Here we go...

Then I saw heaven opened and here came a white horse! The One riding it was called "Faithful" and "True," and with justice He judges and goes to war. (Revelation 19:11). John sees Jesus coming back to earth as a conquering King. When Jesus came the first time He wore a crown of thorns. Now He is wearing, not just one crown, but many crowns, diadems, symbols of victory. His eyes are like a flame of fire. He returns to judge and rule the world.

Jesus, also known as the Word of God, is wearing bloodstained war garments. However, the blood on His clothes is not that of soldiers on the battlefield. His robe is stained with His own blood! In the Old Testament an animal without blemish was offered as a sacrifice for the sins of the people (Leviticus 4-6). Its blood was sprinkled before the Lord in order to satisfy God's holy demands. In the same way the blood sacrifice of the perfect Lamb of glory, Jesus, satisfied God's requirement for the payment of sin. So here we see Jesus returning, not only as Conqueror and King, but also as Savior. As Jesus returns to the earth He is not alone. **The armies that are in heaven, dressed in white, clean, fine linen, were following Him on white horses.** (Revelation 19:14) Jesus is accompanied by the saints of heaven! If you believe in Jesus then you are part of this group here!

Paul describes the return of Jesus from earth's perspective: For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18) The bodies of all the saints, first the dead and then the living, rise up to meet Jesus. As the bodies of both the dead and living rise up they are transformed. Again, here is Paul's description... Listen, I will tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. (1 Corinthians 15:51-53) The physical bodies of the saints are changed into glorified, imperishable bodies. They will never die again.

From His [Jesus'] mouth extends a sharp sword, so that with it He can strike the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod, and He stomps the winepress of the furious wrath of God, the All-Powerful. He has a name written on His clothing and on His thigh: "King of kings and Lord of lords." (Revelation 19:15-16) The winepress that is mentioned here takes us back to the horrific battlefield carnage described so graphically in Revelation 14. It all takes place in what is known as the Battle of Armageddon. This happens shortly after Jesus's return to earth. The sharp sword from His mouth indicates the power of His spoken words.

The Battle of Armageddon conjures up this idea of a major confrontation between good and evil at the end of history. But, as it turns out, it's really not much of a battle at all. In fact, it's fairly one-sided. An angel, God's messenger, gives pre-battle instructions to the birds... Then I saw one angel standing in the sun, and he shouted in a loud voice to all the birds flying high in the sky: "Come, gather around for the great banquet of God, to eat your fill of the flesh of kings, the flesh of generals, the flesh of powerful people, the flesh of horses and those who ride them, and the flesh of all people, both free and slave, and small and great!" (Revelation 19:17-18)

Earlier John had witnessed the armies of the earth moving toward Armageddon. Now he sees them assembled and poised for battle. Picture the scene. The heavily-armed forces of evil from many nations of the earth and backed by Satan and the antichrist are positioned on one side of the valley. Who's on the other side? Jesus and the saints – the armies dressed in white, clean fine linen. So the battle is set.

Now the beast was seized, and along with him the false prophet who had performed the signs on his behalf – signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. Both of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire burning with sulfur. The others were killed by the sword that extended from the mouth of the One who rode the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves with their flesh. (Revelation 19:20-21). The antichrist and the false prophet are thrown alive into the lake of fire. There is no resistance at all. Jesus speaks a word and all of the armies are wiped out! That's it. Not really much of a battle, was it? The carnage from this battle was described earlier in the book in much more graphic detail. The birds and other wild creatures enjoy a feast.

In the end JESUS WINS!!

So then, what about Satan, the mastermind behind all of this evil? What happens to him? Then I saw an angel descending from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the abyss and a huge chain. He seized the dragon – the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan – and tied him up for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:1-2) Earlier in Revelation we saw where Satan had the key to the abyss and he opened it releasing the demonic forces. Now an angel from heaven holds the key to the abyss. Satan is no longer in control. He is seized and restrained for a thousand years.

Notice that unlike the antichrist and false prophet, Satan is NOT thrown alive into the lake of fire. The angel then threw him [Satan] into the abyss and locked and sealed it so that he could not deceive the nations until the one thousand years were finished. (Revelation 20:3) Then you have this curious statement in parenthesis: After these things he [Satan] must be released for a brief period of time. Satan is released? What? Are you serious? Why doesn't God just finish off the old devil right here and now? As we will see shortly, God has a reason for not doing this.

Well, mercifully the terrible seven-year Tribulation Period is over. Jesus has returned and defeated the forces of evil. The antichrist and false prophet have been dealt with. Satan has been placed in maximum security. Evil has been temporarily restrained. There is peace on the earth. This ushers in the 1000-year reign of Christ.

The Tribulation saints have all been gathered up. The entire bride of Christ now assembles around a great banquet table. In their glorified, imperishable bodies, the bride enjoys fellowship together at the wedding celebration of the Lamb. Their Groom, the triumphant Lord Jesus is seated with them. We hear wedding bells. And then we hear coronation trumpets. The Lamb, the Lord Jesus, the Holy One of Israel, the great I AM makes His way to the throne to rule over all nations of the earth.

Jesus is the Supreme Ruler reigning in majesty and splendor. He selects four special groups to share in His rule. First is the remnant of Israel who is given the privilege to rule the earth with their Messiah. The prophets Isaiah, Micah and Zechariah predicted this. Included with this group are the 144,000 saved Tribulation Jews from each of the 12 tribes of Israel. Second are the Twelve Apostles. Jesus promised them that they would govern with Him in His kingdom. Third are New Testament believers. These are the "conquerors" mentioned in the seven letters to the seven churches. They comprise all believers from Pentecost to the Rapture. The fourth group is the faithful Tribulation saints who are featured so prominently in the book of Revelation.

Redeemed humanity has no more cultural, ethnic or racial divisions. No longer are there distinctions between Jews and Gentiles. There is no separation between Israel and the church. All the saints of all time make up ONE body of Christ. They rule together with Jesus on the earth in complete harmony. This is the way the Lord intended His redeemed to operate all along. For just as the body [our physical body] is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body – though many – are one body, so too is Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12)

The one-thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ on the earth is also referred to as the "Millennial Kingdom." It is a physical kingdom. Jesus reigns from His capital in Jerusalem. It is a period of peace and prosperity. There are no wars. There are no conflicts. There is little or no crime. People from all over the world go to Jerusalem to worship God and to hear Jesus teach. Isaiah describes this reign as a period of prosperity when justice and fairness will prevail upon the earth (Isaiah 9).

At this point in time Jesus and His saints are on the earth and in their glorified (immortal) bodies. But did you realize that at the same time there are some human beings on earth who are still in their fallen, sinful, physical bodies? These people have yet to be transformed. They marry, have children, and battle their old sinful nature. They continue to grow old and die. Who are these people? They are the unbelievers who were not killed at Armageddon. They're still around. So then, during the reign of Christ on earth, not everyone is a believer in Jesus. Not everyone recognizes Jesus as their Savior and Lord, though they willfully submit to His rule. As the centuries pass these people have children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Over time their descendants' feigned respect for God dissipates. The fear that the nations initially had when Jesus first began to rule eventually turns into hatred and resentment.

Now when the thousand years are finished, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to bring them together for the battle. They are as numerous as the grains of sand in the sea. (Revelation 20:7-8) Satan is released and goes out and recruits millions of people. He gathers them together from all of the nations of the earth.

They conspire to throw off the rule of Jesus Christ which, because of Satan's influence, they view as being oppressive. Satan leads them into one last rebellion against Jesus and His Kingdom. These rebels do not remember what happened to their ancestors 1000 years earlier at the Battle of Armageddon. They don't learn from history.

Despite centuries of Jesus's majestic and perfect rule of the earth; despite years and years of enjoying a great life in a prosperous and benevolent world; despite a prolonged period of peace and plenty; despite the godly influence of all the glorified saints – despite all of this, Satan is able to successfully deceive millions of people! He uses the same tactic he used in the garden against Adam and Eve. He casts doubt on God's love and goodness. The sad result is that many believe Satan's lies rather than God. Some things never change!

You can probably guess how the rebellion against Jesus turns out. It does not end well for Satan and his army of rebels... They went up on the broad plain of the earth and encircled the camp of the saints and the beloved city [Jerusalem], but fire came down from heaven and devoured them completely. (Revelation 20:9) Those who have aligned themselves with the devil are destroyed. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are too, and they will be tormented there day and night forever and ever. (Revelation 20:10) Finally Satan joins the antichrist and false prophet and all those people he deceived in the flames of hell.

At the end of the Millennial Kingdom a second resurrection of the dead takes place. The first resurrection occurred in Revelation 19 in conjunction with Jesus's Second Coming. It involved only the resurrection of believers. This second resurrection will be the bodily resurrection of everyone else – all those who were NOT raised the first time. The remainder of humanity is raised from the dead. All unbelievers now stand face to face with the living God. There is no escape. **Then I saw a large white throne and the One who was seated on it; the earth and the heaven fled from His presence, and no place was found for them... The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them and each one was judged according to his [or her] deeds.** (Revelation 20:11, 13) This is often referred to as the "Great White Throne Judgment."

Those who stand before God at this judgment are judged for their deeds. They are condemned to an eternity without God because they willfully rejected Jesus as their Savior and Lord. **If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, that person was thrown into the lake of fire.** (Revelation 20:15) "The book of life" here is the "Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:27), the Lamb being Jesus. It contains the names of everyone who believes in Jesus, those who are saved and are recipients of eternal life.

But to the cowards, unbelievers, detestable persons, murderers, the sexually immoral, and those who practice magic spells, idol worshipers, and all those who lie, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. That is the second death. (Revelation 21:8) There are several types of evil people listed here. What I want to draw your attention to are the "unbelievers." This means that unbelievers – those who do not believe in and follow Jesus Christ – will be consigned for eternity in the lake of fire. This is a startling thought!

From this point on, sin, Satan, death and hell are never mentioned again.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and earth had ceased to exist, and the sea existed no more. (Revelation 21:1) Peter describes how the physical universe we see now will one day "cease to exist." He says, The present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire... the heavens will disappear with a horrific noise... [they] will be burned up and dissolve, and the celestial bodies will melt away in a blaze!" (2 Peter 3:7-12)

God immediately creates a new heaven and new earth to take the place of the old.

And I saw the holy city – the new Jerusalem – descending out of heaven from God, made ready like a bride adorned for her husband. (Revelation 21:2) This "new Jerusalem" is the eternal dwelling place of the saints. Jesus Christ, the Groom presents His bride, the saints of all time, with their brand new home. It is a physical place that He personally has prepared for them. And He promised that He would. One of the last things Jesus told His disciples was this: "I am going away to make ready a place for you. And if I go and make ready a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with Me, so that where I am you me be too." (John 14:2-3)

So now we see a new heaven and a new earth. There is a new physical dwelling place for the saints in eternity. It is a place where God's people can have unending fellowship with their Lord. There are no tears in this place because there is no sorrow, no sickness and no pain. There is no longer death because there is no more sin. The saints exist forever in their resurrected, glorified, incorruptible bodies. Jesus makes this formal statement to all His saints... And the One seated on the throne said: "Look! I am making all things new!" Then He said to me, "Write it down, because these words are reliable and true." He also said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the one who is thirsty I will give water free of charge from the spring of the water of life. The one who conquers will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son." (Revelation 21:5-7) What the saints of God enjoy now in their brand new eternal home far exceeds anything they have ever seen or experienced before!

So He took me away in the Spirit to a huge, majestic mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. (Revelation 21:10) John sees a perfect utopia far greater than existed even in the Garden of Eden. Revelation 21 offers a long description of this incredible place. John sees the holy city as a beautiful self-contained paradise. It has a lot of wonderful things in it. Unlike God's original creation there is no sin here. Satan is not roaming around free seeking to deceive people. There is no specific place of worship (temple or church building) in this city because God is worshipped everywhere.

In Revelation 21 a lengthy description of John's vision of the eternal holy city is given. The geometric shape is a cube. Some think it could be a pyramid – maybe so. Its length, width and height are the same, about 1,500 miles. The area on the ground is roughly half the size of the continental United States. This city appears to hang suspended above the new earth. The physical laws of the old universe do not seem to apply here. The new earth contains no oceans. But it does have mountains because in his vision John is standing on top of one of them.

The foundation of the holy city contains twelve layers of precious stones around the entire perimeter of the city, 6,000 total miles in length! The walls are made of jasper and are over 200 feet thick. The glory of God is reflected in a spectrum of brilliant color. On each foundation layer is written the names of the twelve apostles. The various elements that make up the infrastructure of the city (buildings, bridges, streets and sidewalks) are made of a material described as **pure gold like clear glass**. (Revelation 21:18) Transparent gold! This is a new element.

John sees twelve gates, three on each side of the holy city. Each gate is made from a single (very large) pearl. These are the "pearly gates" we have all heard about. Angels are stationed at each gate (no, Saint Peter) and these gates never close. Each gate has a name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel on it. Why are there gates? Everybody who has ever been saved for all time exists now is in his or her glorified, eternal body. They all live in perfect peace inside this beautiful, perfect, holy city. They have everything they need here. The very presence of God dwells inside. So then, why are there gates? Why would there ever be a need to leave?

The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their grandeur into it. Its gates will never be closed during the day (and there will be no night there). They will bring the grandeur and the wealth of the nations into it, but nothing ritually unclean will ever enter into it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or practices falsehood, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21:24-27) John sees a new earth with various people groups inhabiting it. They have "kings" over them who regularly enter and exit the holy city. We know that all humanity from the original creation is now in one of two places.

They are either in the lake of fire or in the beautiful holy city of God. So then, who are these "nations" and "kings of the earth"? Well, frankly, this is a mystery.

Some have conjectured that perhaps God creates new inhabitants for His new earth. Some think maybe these are beings from some other planet. Perhaps these are some of the redeemed saints who move freely in and out of the holy city. Maybe these are angels or angelic beings that appear to be human. We don't know for sure. Whoever they are, they are part of God's newly created order.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life – water as clear as crystal – pouring out from the throne of God and of the Lamb, flowing down the middle of the city's main street. On each side of the river is the tree of life producing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month of the year. Its leaves are for the healing of the nations. (READ Revelation 22:1-2) Where have we seen the tree of life before? We saw it at the beginning of the story in the Garden of Eden... The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow from the soil, every tree that was pleasing to look at and good for food. Now the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil were in the middle of the orchard. (Genesis 2:9) Here in the beautiful holy city of God at the end of the biblical story the tree of life reappears.

The tree if life is no ordinary tree. It's a single tree and yet it somehow exists "on each side of the river." The leaves from this tree contribute to the physical well-being of people. But why would there be any need for "healing" in this place where people do not grow old and die and where there is no pain and sickness? There is just so much mystery and intrigue with this new creation!

God's new creation is a physical place. God described His original creation, which was also a physical creation as "good." This new creation is even better! Like before there is eating and drinking. There are trees and plants and animals and rivers and mountains. As pretty as God's original creation was, His new creation is even more beautiful!

And there will no longer be any curse, and the throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city. His servants will worship Him... (Revelation 22:3) The curse that God placed upon mankind because of Adam and Eve's original sin has been removed. The unlimited potential that God has for His creation can now be realized. The redeemed saints of God, His servants are no longer in bondage to sin. They no longer have divided loyalties. They are no longer sidetracked by the enticements of lustful passions. Now they can be completely focused on serving and worshipping God.

They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. (Revelation 22:4) Two amazing thoughts here. First, redeemed humanity can actually SEE God's face. They could not do this in the original creation. When Moses asked God if he could

see His glory, God replied, "You cannot see My face, for no one can see Me and live." (Exodus 33:20). Second, the saints of God are going to bear God's new name. This is what Jesus promised to the overcomers of the church at Philadelphia. He said, "The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name as well." (Revelation 3:12)

And with that the vision of the end times is over. John awakens and finds himself back in his present day. He is still a prisoner of Rome and still exiled on the same island. He's a mortal man physically trapped in both space and time, just as we are. John is not where he wants to be – NOT YET anyway!

John's heavenly tour guide gives him some parting words. Then the angel said to me, "These words are reliable and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent His angel to show His servants what must happen soon." (Revelation 22:6) The angel reminds John of what Jesus told him back in Revelation 3, that Jesus is coming soon. And then he adds this: "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy contained in this book, because the time is near." (Revelation 22:10)

So while the end time prophecies in the book of Daniel were sealed, the prophecies of the book of Revelation are not. And why not? Because the "time is near." Immediate action by its readers and hearers is required.

Jesus Himself gives John a message to pass along to all who will listen: "Look! I am coming soon, and My reward is with Me to pay each one according to what he has done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end!" (Revelation 22:12-13).

The Bible ends with an open invitation: And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say: "Come!" And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wants it take the water of life free of charge. (Revelation 22:17)

The banquet is even now being prepared. The price for admission has been paid. The table is being set. The food is in the kitchen being prepared. There's plenty of room for everyone. So, "Come!"

There you have the biblical story.

CONCLUSION

. Having heard God's story and listened to His words, it's time for us, the readers, to respond. It's time for action. Do you remember the bookmark I had you place between Revelation Chapters 3 and 4? I want you to go back to that place.

I'm often asked, "Where am I in the Bible story?" The answer is, YOU ARE HERE – between Chapters 3 and 4. Everything that happens from Chapter 4 to the end of Revelation is in the future for YOU. It hasn't happened yet. So, like John, you and I are presently trapped in space in time somewhere between Chapters 3 and 4.

This is exciting news. It means that YOU get to determine YOUR OWN ending to the story. That's right, YOU DO. You get to make the choice how it will all end up for you. Throughout the story we have emphasized the concept of top line and bottom line. Top line is God's way. Bottom line is any other way. In the story we observed over and over that things worked out much better in the end for those who were top line than for those who were bottom line. The ending YOU get to choose is no different. The question is "Will you be top line and follow God's way? Or will you take your chance by going down a different path?" It's YOUR decision. You are free to choose but you must live with the consequences of your choice.

So let's review the options. Revelation describes two possible eternal destinations. This means that every one of us will eventually end up in one of these two places.

OPTION 1 – Revelation 20 talks about the "lake of fire." This is the second death – the lake of fire. If anyone's name was NOT found written in the book of life, that person was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:14-15) This makes it clear that people whose names are not in this book of life, those who are not saved, will end up in a terrible place. This is NOT a good option!

The better option is OPTION 2 – Revelation 22 describes God's beautiful holy city containing "the river of the water of life." This pristine river flows right down Main Street. And there will no longer be any curse, and the throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city. His servants will worship Him, and they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. Night will be no more, and they will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will shine on them, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:3-5). Who is in this place? The servants of the Lamb, followers of Jesus; those who belong to Him. When you read the full description of this glorious place in Revelation 21 and 22 it is absolutely amazing! Why would anyone NOT want to end up here?

The Bible in a real sense is a road map that will ultimately lead us to where we want to go. Jesus taught that there is a wide gate with a spacious highway "**that leads**

to destruction" (the lake of fire). This is the most popular route. It's the one most heavily traveled. Jesus said that "many enter through it." But Jesus said that there is also a "narrow gate" with a "difficult" pathway "that leads to life" (that beautiful holy city). Jesus said this path is not nearly as well traveled. In fact, He said "there are few who find it." (Matthew 7:13-14)

Why is it that so many people are traveling down the highway leading to destruction? If you were to stop and ask them, most would tell you that they would like to end up in the beautiful city with its river of life. The problem is that they are on the wrong road! Either they are trying to get to that place their own way or they are completely lost and need to be re-directed. We cannot enjoy God's blessing on our own terms. As we have seen throughout the biblical story, this is NOT how God operates. HE is the sovereign Creator. We are HIS creation. That means we MUST do things God's way. We must trust that HE knows what's best for us. **He does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.** (2 Peter 3:9) And yet God allows us the freedom to choose our own ending to the story.

With that said, I have great news for you! If you want to end up in the beautiful city of God that is filled with the wonder of God's holy presence, YOU CAN. Just follow the biblical road map. Enter through that narrow gate. Then head down the difficult path. This is the Jesus road to salvation! It is the road less traveled.

For this is the way God loved the world: He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16) The one who believes in the Son has eternal life. The one who rejects the Son will not see life, but God's wrath remains on him. (John 3:36)

What does it mean to "believe" in Jesus? It goes beyond merely believing that Jesus was a real historical figure. To believe in Jesus means that you believe all the things that Jesus claimed about Himself are true. To believe in Jesus means that you believe what God the Father said about His Son Jesus is true. Finally, to believe in Jesus means you believe what the Apostles and New Testament writers said concerning Him was true. Believing all this, you then follow Him.

YOU CAN choose to end up in God's beautiful holy city. According to the biblical road map that we have been given we get there on the Jesus road. No other way. Jesus said, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."** (John 14:6).

So then, choose wisely and choose quickly. None of us are going to live forever in this old world. Come to Jesus while you still have time! You've been given the invitation, but the clock is ticking.