

New Testament Bible Reading December 19 - 30

Monday, December 19 – Revelation 11

In verses 1 and 2 John is given a measuring rod to go and measure the Temple of the Lord. The question is this: Was this a literal Temple that John was told to measure or did the Temple, referred to in these verses, represent something that was symbolic? In the Old Testament, after Israel went into exile and the Temple had been destroyed, in prophetic visions, God told both Ezekiel (Ezekiel 40-43) and Zechariah (Zechariah 2) to take a rod and measure the Temple that God had showed them in their visions. Both of their visions were given to help Israel as they returned from exile to be able to rebuild the Temple so worship could again take place. In both of their visions they took and recorded measurements, which were to be used in the rebuilding of the Temple. But here in Revelation, in John's vision, there are no measurements recorded. Why would the vision God gave to the Old Testament Prophets be so specific, while John's vision lacks details? Before we answer that, let's ask a few more questions. Notice in verse 1, John is told to count the worshippers there, but yet John records no count, why? Why did the curtain separating the Holy of Holies for the rest of the Temple tear in two when Jesus was crucified (Matthew 27:51)?

These questions are fundamental to understanding whether or not John is referring to a literal Temple that would be rebuilt in Jerusalem prior to the return of Jesus, or whether John is being told to measure a symbolic Temple that represents something other than an actual building. Before I go on let me say that there are many who believe that a literal Temple will be rebuilt, in Jerusalem, prior to Jesus' return. They also believe that the Holy City referred to in verse 2 is Jerusalem. While it is possible that the Temple may one day be rebuilt, I don't believe that type of Temple is what these verses are referring to. Remember, Revelation is a book filled with symbolic images, and I believe that is the case here. The reason John cannot record a measurement for the inner court, as he was told to do, and the reason John does provide a count of the

worshippers, as John was told to do, is because they are immeasurable and uncountable. Remember how in Revelation 5 John described the multitudes of believers around the throne of God as being people from every tribe, tongue and language and being too numerous to count. I believe that the Temple area John is told to measure is symbolic of the church, which the New Testament refers to as the Temple of the Lord. The curtain ripped in two when Jesus was crucified because his death on the cross did away with the need for the Temple. If that is true, why would a physical Temple need to be rebuilt in order for Jesus to come again?

Similarly, I believe that the Holy City referred to in verse 2 is not Jerusalem, but rather is a reference to the people of God, whom the Gentiles (non-believers) are trying to destroy, but they cannot because they too belong to God (Revelation 9:4). The forty two months is also not a literal period of time, but rather represents the period of time between Jesus' ascension into heaven and his second coming.

Similar questions come up concerning the two witnesses that John refers to in verses 3-14. Are they real people, or do they represent something else. Some believe these two witnesses are Enoch and Elijah, both of whom never tasted death, others believe they refer to Moses and Elijah, in fact you can just about pick your heroes from the Bible and it's possible, if this is referring to two real people, that it could be referring to them. There is another possibility, however, and it is this, these two witnesses could be symbolic of the church and its ministry. Look how they are described in verse 4, as two olive trees and two lampstands, and remember that in Revelation 1 Jesus has already told us that lampstands represent his church. Olive oil was what was used to light the lamps in John's day so the two olive trees provide an endless source of oil for the lamps. All this makes sense as we remember that the church is called to be light in a dark world. Notice the time frame again when all of this is happening. 1,260 days divided by 30 equal 42 months, the same period of time as referred to in verse 2. There are many who believe this refers to a specific 3 ½ year period of time which

is part of the Tribulation. Again, my preference is to see this as a symbolic period of time between Christ's ascension and his return.

Notice in verses 7-10 the beast (a representative of Satan), seems to be victorious over these witnesses and seems to overpower them, but after 3 ½ days (a short period of time) they are resurrected by God in view of the whole world. Again I think this is in reference to the church. There are times when it seems as if Satan has won, but in the end it will be clear to all that the church will triumph through Christ and the power of God, as those who have trusted Christ as their savior are resurrected to new life before the eyes of everyone.

In verse 15, just before the seventh trumpet sounds, John refers to a great earthquake that devastates a tenth of the city and kills 7,000 people. While this is certainly again a great tragedy, in just recent history we have seen far more terrible earthquakes (Haiti) which destroyed far more and killed 100,000's of people. Again, I believe that John's language here is figurative, and refers to an earthquake which shakes the whole world and causes people to realize that the time for final judgment on this world has come.

The remainder of the chapter gives us yet another glimpse into the throne room of heaven, as God prepares to bring judgment on the earth. Notice the worship that continues to go on, and as part of that worship notice how verse 18 speaks of God's justice in punishing those who are evil and rewarding those who have done good.

Tuesday, December 20 – Revelation 12

No matter how one chooses to interpret this chapter, this much is obvious, Satan is a loser and Christ and his church are victorious. In the end, is there really anything else that matters? In order to begin to understand this chapter we must go back to **Genesis 3:15**, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." In this verse God is telling Adam, Eve, and Satan what is going to happen. The

woman will give birth to a child. Satan will try to attack the child (strike his heel), but only wound him. The child (Jesus) will crush the head of Satan.

I believe that the best interpretation for this passage is to see the woman as representing the people of God. Notice in verse 17 that the offspring of the woman are referred to as those who obey God's commands and hold to the testimony of Jesus. It is out of the people of God that Jesus is born (verse 2). The red dragon is Satan who throughout history has attacked the people of God and sought to kill Jesus from the day he was born (verse 4). Verse 5 is a clear reference to Jesus, who will one day rule all of the nations, and who was taken up into heaven (Acts 1). Verse 6 reminds us that just as God protected Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus by sending them to Egypt when Herod wanted to have Jesus killed, God has always throughout history protected his people. Notice that verse 6 again references 1,260 days or 3 ½ years; this corresponds to yesterday's reading from chapter 11. If this time period is seen as being symbolic of the time between Jesus' ascension into heaven and his second coming, then all three references to this period of time correspond to each other.

Verses 7-12 refer to a time of warfare in heaven when Satan is thrown out of heaven and not allowed to accuse God's people anymore. This happened when Jesus ascended to heaven and took the throne after he was raised from the dead. Satan can no longer be our accuser because Christ, the King of Kings is our defender. Satan has lost! But verses 13-17 remind us that even though Satan has lost, he still does all he can do to torment the people of God (the Church). However, as this passage symbolically shows us, Satan cannot defeat the people of God, because God will not allow it to happen.

Wednesday, December 21 – Revelation 13

Chapter 13 gives greater details to what John has talked about in Revelation 12. If we look ahead to Revelation 17:15 we see that the sea that John refers to in verse 1 represents the people of the earth

(those who stand opposed to God). Out of this sea of humanity rises a beast who allies himself with Satan and uses Satanic power to seduce and rule the people of the earth. In modern day American Christianity there is a lot of speculation about this beast and what the 10 horns, 7 heads (one of which looked as if it had been mortally wounded), and 10 crowns mean. I think the easiest and best way to understand this beast is to see it as representing all of the powers of this world that are allied together against the Church—the people of God—that is why they have blasphemous names on their heads. To go into all kinds of other speculation about this beast only has us running down rabbit trails that do nothing to really prepare us for Christ's return. What we need to realize is that the powers of this world have been and will be arrayed against Christ and his Church. We can see how true this is as we look at verses 5-10. Notice again, that this beast is blasphemous, and slanderous toward God. Furthermore, he has also been given power to make war against the Church. Now what comes next in verse 8 is very important. The people of this world will all worship the beast, but those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will not. If we are believers in Christ we do not have to worry about being seduced by the beast and his power, because it just cannot happen if we belong to Christ.

The second beast that John refers to in verses 11-18 is best interpreted as representing the philosophies of this world that are contrary to Christianity. This beast with the philosophies of this world comes out of the earth, which is the exact opposite of Christ—the wisdom of God who came down from heaven. These beasts seem to be a parody of Christ. One has been healed from a mortal wound and together they can do things that seem to be miracles. Together, the powers of this world and the philosophies of this world combine to control the world. There has been a lot of speculation concerning the mark of the beast and the number 666. Again I would suggest that the best way to understand this is symbolically. Remember in Revelation 9:4 the people who have the seal (mark) of God on their foreheads are protected from the evil that is unleashed on the world, because they belong to God. The people in these verses do not have the seal of God, but rather they have a mark

from the beast, which symbolizes that they belong to the beast. I believe the number 666 also should be interpreted symbolically. In Revelation the number 7 is the number of completeness, it could be thought of as the number of God. If we think of it this way the number 6 is one short of completeness and represents Satan. As powerful as Satan is, everything he does is incomplete. Every time he opposes God he loses. 666 is the mark of Satan the loser! But even as a loser, Satan still must not be underestimated. Notice that all who wear his mark also are slaves to his system (verses 15-17), and those who don't have the mark will suffer in poverty, because they will not be able to buy and sell.

Thursday, December 22 - Revelation 14

The beginning of chapter 14 gives us a sharp contrast to what we read yesterday in chapter 13. Here we see the Lamb of God standing on Mt. Zion (the holy mountain) surrounded by his people who are worshipping him. Remember from chapter 5 the 144,000 is a symbolic number, which represents the completeness, fullness and perfection of the people of God. Whereas, deception marks the beast and his followers, verse 5 tells us that there is no deception in the mouths of those who worship the Lamb of God.

Next, John tells us of three angels that he sees flying over the earth. The first angel cries out to all the inhabitants of the earth to worship God and give him glory because the hour of judgment has come. The second angel's message comes because the people of this world (Babylon) refuse to respond to the first angel's message and repent. The third angel pronounces the judgment that is to come to those who are marked by the mark of the beast. The judgment is clearly a picture of hell—a place of no rest and eternal torment (verses 10-11). John encourages those who belong to Christ to patiently endure, even though they may have to suffer, because a time is coming when judgment will come to those who have oppressed them, and rest will come to those who patiently endure (verses 12-13).

The judgment that is to come is portrayed in the final seven verses of this chapter. Notice the symbolic harvest that is taking place as Jesus (verse 14) and several angels have sickles in their hands to go out to harvest the ripe grapes from the vine of this earth. This is symbolic language, which represents that the evil of this world has reached its fullness. Notice what happens to the grapes—they are thrown into the winepress of God's wrath, which symbolizes God's judgment and punishment of those who oppose him.

Friday, December 23 – Revelation 15

Chapter 15 begins the final cycle of judgments on those who oppose God. The previous cycles of judgments marked by the opening of the 7 seals and the sounding of the 7 trumpets only resulted in partial destruction of the earth and its inhabitants, but now starting in chapter 15 we see the complete and final destruction of the people of this earth who stand opposed to God. Chapter 15 starts with a vision of those who have been victorious over the beast singing songs of praise to God. Their joy, peace and security stands in direct opposition to those who are about to face their ultimate final judgment and destruction. This is a recurring theme throughout the book of Revelation—the joyous victory of the believers in Christ and the destruction of those who oppose Christ. In this sequence of judgment there are seven angels who are carrying 7 plagues to the inhabitants of the earth (inhabitants of the earth never includes those who are Christians—it is a reference to those who oppose Christ). Verse 7 tells us that the four living creatures who surround the throne of God give each of the angels a chest filled with the wrath of God to pour out on the people of the earth.

Saturday, December 24 – Revelation 16

Chapter 16 opens with a command for the angels to take the bowls of God's wrath (containing the 7 plagues) and pour them out on the earth. The first bowl of wrath afflicts those who have the mark of the beast with painful sores, which is similar to one of the plagues of Egypt, which afflicted the Egyptians with pain boils, while the Israelites—the people of

God were left unaffected. The second bowl of wrath is poured out and it turns the seas into blood, which kills all of the marine life in them. The third bowl of wrath is poured out and it affects all of the fresh water that flows on the earth. Again, note the connection to the plagues in Egypt when Moses turned the waters of the Nile to blood. But also note what verses 5 to 7 say as these bowls are poured out. Turning the water to blood is a just judgment on the earth, because those who have opposed God have shed the blood of martyrs for Christ. You may recall from Revelation 6:9 that as the 6th seal was opened by the Lamb the voice of those who had been martyred were crying out for justice from under the altar, now that justice has come. I believe that is why in verse 7 the altar responds to these judgments by praising the Lord and saying his judgments are just and true. The fourth bowl of wrath causes the sun to burn more intensely and scorch the plant life and the people of the earth. But notice verse 9; people know that this is from God, but they still refuse to repent and believe. The fifth angel brings a plague of darkness, and once again we see a resemblance to the plagues in Egypt. But we also see that just like Pharaoh's heart remained hard, the people who are experiencing these plagues hearts remain hard as well.

As the 6th angel pours out the 6th bowl of God's wrath, John tells us that the waters of the Euphrates River dry up to make a highway so that the kings of east can gather in one place for the final great Battle of Armageddon. Again, many seek to try to interpret who these kings will be and what countries they will represent, but that really isn't productive because there is not enough information for us to make a determination about that. What is important is what Jesus says next in verse 15—to be ready for this day, to be prepared for this day. Being prepared means that we are ready in our personal lives and in our relationship with Jesus.

When the 7th angel pours out the last bowl of judgment, it means the end has come. The lightning, thunder and earthquake are all signs of God's judgment being poured out.

Sunday, December 25 – Revelation 17

Chapters 17 and 18 provide more information about the cycles of judgment that John has described earlier as the 7 seals being broken, or the 7 trumpets sounding, or the 7 bowls of wrath being poured out. All of these are describing similar events in different ways and now in these next two chapters more details are given. Notice in verse 1 that it is one of the 7 angels who poured out the 7 bowls of wrath who comes to John to explain to John what has just happened. The easiest way to understand these next few chapters is to think of them in terms of a tale of two women. The woman portrayed in chapter 17 and 18 is portrayed as a prostitute. The woman portrayed in chapter 19 is portrayed as the bride of Christ. One goes to her destruction the other to her glory. The prostitute represents the people of the world who stand opposed to God. Chapters 17 and 18 also portray these same people as the people of Babylon. Just like everything else in these chapters, Babylon is symbolic not literal. Babylon represents the people of the world who oppress the people of God, just like ancient Babylon did to Israel when they defeated them and took them into exile. In chapter 17, the woman is portrayed as a prostitute because she is trying to seduce people away from following Christ.

The prostitute is riding a scarlet beast who represents Satan (the beast). The beast and the prostitute represent all of the evil of this earth. At some point that evil will reach its fullness and then Christ will come to defeat it completely (verse 14).

Monday, December 26 – Revelation 18

Chapter 18 continues the description of the fall of Babylon (the kingdom of this world). Verse 4 has a strong warning for us, that even though we live in the world, we must not be part of it, and think like it does, or else we run the danger of facing the same fate that it does. Chapter 18 makes it very clear that the system of the world, the world's way of thinking, is about to be judged, and those who care more about themselves than God are about to be completely ruined. As destruction

comes to the world and it's system of thinking, government and commerce, there are many who mourn it's passing. Kings, merchants and captains of the sea all mourn because all that they knew and loved has been lost, all that they have lived for is gone. Judgment has come, God is about to bring an end to the worlds' way of life—an end to the rebellion against God's rule (verses 21-24). However, in the midst of all this mourning there is a cry for the saints (the people of God) to rejoice (verse 20), because victory has finally come.

Tuesday, December 27 – Revelation 19

Chapter 19 begins with songs of praise and worship for the judgment that is coming to the world. In fact, in verse 6, all of heaven is rejoicing that the time has come for judgment for the wicked and blessing for the righteous (those who have placed their full faith and confidence in Christ). What a stark contrast is painted for us. While the earth is being judged the saints are preparing for a wedding feast—a feast that will mark them as the bride of Christ and make them his forever—the Wedding Supper of the Lamb.

But before the wedding can take place, the adulterous and rebellious people of the world along with Satan and his army, must be defeated once and for all. So starting in verse 11, we see the armies of heaven riding out for the final battle. Jesus is the one who is on the white horse leading the army. The description that follows makes that clear: he is called Faithful and True (11), he has many crowns on his head (12), his robe has been dipped in blood (13), his name is the Word of God (13), out of his mouth comes a sharp sword (the word God) to strike down the nations (15), he will rule with an iron scepter and be called King of Kings and Lord of Lords (16).

Verses 17 to 21 describe the battle that follows as the armies of heaven crush the army of Satan.

Wednesday, December 28 – Revelation 20

There is much debate over how chapter 20 should be interpreted. Chapter 20 begins by talking about a 1000 year reign of Christ, after which Satan is released to go and deceive the nations. There are several problems to try to understand. Most of the problems revolve around the sequence of events that take place. John already told us in chapter 19 that Satan has been defeated. Was it only a temporary defeat? Does Satan live to fight again (20:1-3), or is John recounting what has just happened in chapter 19. I believe that what happens in chapter 20 is a recounting of what just happened in chapter 19. There will be a period of time before Satan's final defeat when Satan and his activity will be curtailed by the power of Christ, after that time Satan will make one last attempt to overthrow Christ and his rule, and he will be defeated and judged as we saw already in chapter 19.

There is a lot of debate about the 1000 year reign that is talked about in chapter 20. Is it a literal one thousand year period of time or is it symbolic? Does the 1000 year period come before Christ's return (pre-millennial), or after Christ's return (post-millennial), or are the 1000 years a symbolic picture of Christ's current rule in heaven as he waits to make his final return (amillennial). In my opinion all three of these views are valid interpretations, and there is something to be said for each of them. The point is that Christ is now reigning victoriously in heaven, and one day he will rule over all of heaven and earth, and we will reign with him forever.

In verses 11-15, the day of final judgment comes. Notice as you read this that everyone will be resurrected to face this judgment. Those who are in Christ have their name written in the Book of Life and are resurrected to eternal life. Those who stand opposed to Christ are resurrected to eternal damnation.

Thursday, December 29 – Revelation 21

In chapter 21, John gives a picture of the New Jerusalem, the Holy City of God coming down from heaven. Again, I believe this is more of a symbolic picture than a literal description. This Holy City represents the

people of God who have been made holy and righteous through the blood of Christ. This city is where God will make his dwelling, and where God will protect his people. What we should notice is the city is perfect. The description begins with the old heavens and earth passing away and Jesus proclaiming that he is making all things new (verses 1-5). This city is represented as the radiant bride of Christ (Ephesians 5), ready at last for the wedding to take place. Ready at last to become Christ's forever. It is described as a perfect cube made of glittering jewels. There is no need for a temple in the city because God and the Lamb (Christ) are the temple. There is no need for an external light source because God and the Lamb provide radiant light. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will be there.

Friday, December 30 – Revelation 22

The beginning of chapter 22 completes the description begun in chapter 21. There is a stream of living water flowing from the throne of God that water the twin trees of life that give eternal life to all. There is no longer any sickness or death or curse of sin. Everyone living there will have God's name on their forehead symbolizing that they belong to him. Revelation closes with Jesus' promise that he is coming soon (verses 7, 12, and 20), and exhortations to be faithful (verses 7, 12). Jesus reminds us that he is the beginning and the end and we are each welcome to come and find our life in him (verse 17).

Come Lord Jesus. Come.