

Revelation 21-22 Seminar

May-July 2009

Participants:

Kevin Barney

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Overview - Revelation 21-22

Welcome to the fourth iteration of the **Mormon Theology Seminar**. Previous versions have focused on Abraham, Alma 32, and the recently completed "Reading Nephi Reading Isaiah" seminar on 2 Nephi 26-27. This time around we are going to focus on Revelation 21-22, the final two chapters in the New Testament. Our fearless leader for this go-round is Julie Smith of Austin, Texas, who blogs at timesandseasons.org, and I imagine that she will add any housekeeping details that I may have missed.

This seminar will feature 12 weeks of blog discussion by six participants; this general post is the first volley in the series. Then, sometime in September (date to be determined), there will be a conference in Austin where the participants will each present a paper dealing with some aspect of these particular chapters. (I already have an idea for mine!) It should be great fun, and I'm looking forward to the experience.

After this initial post, the other weeks will be devoted to small portions of the text, on the order of three to five verses, so we will really drill down into some fine detail as the weeks progress. For this initial foray, it seems to me that we ought to focus on broader contextual issues affecting the chapters as a whole, and indeed the rest of the Apocalypse of which these chapters form the conclusion.

As I reread the chapters, I thought of two broad issues that I would like to roll out there for discussion. (Others should of course feel free to raise other broad, contextual issues in the comments to this post.)

1. The first is, to what extent are we constrained in our readings by modern scripture?

I'll give two illustrations, and then show how this issue arises in our selected chapters.

The first illustration has to do with who authored this book. The traditional position is that the "John" of Revelation is the Apostle John. This is certainly the most common point of view of the early external evidence, such as titles of the book as they developed in the manuscripts and attributions in the Church Fathers (the most notable exception being Dionysius). But my impression, and please correct me if I am wrong, is that on internal grounds most modern scholars would agree with Dionysius that the Gospel of John and Revelation could not have been written by the same man. These scholars acknowledge that Revelation was written by an otherwise unknown "John," just not the Apostle with that name. The Book of Mormon, however, clearly identifies the Apostle John as the author of Revelation (see 1 Nephi 14:18-27 and Ether 4:16). So does a modern Mormon student have leave to conclude that the Apostle John was not the author of Revelation, the Book of Mormon passages notwithstanding? Why or why not?

The second illustration has to do with basic approaches to the material in Revelation. The LDS Institute Manual for the NT in Section 12 describes basic scholarly approaches to Revelation. Under the caption "The Non-prophetic View" the authors describe two approaches. One is the *preterist* approach, which was influenced by the historical-critical schools of the scholarship of the last couple of centuries. According to this view, Revelation is describing events of the author's own day. Another school is the idealists, who read Revelation allegorically. Under the caption "The Prophetic View," the

authors similarly describe two different approaches. The historicists see Revelation as describing the history of the church from the time it was written to the day of judgment. So while this material was future from John's perspective, most of it is past from ours. Finally, the futurists see the material in the book (after the letters to the churches) as relating to the last days.

The manual goes on to describe in contrast "A View Based on Latter-day Revelation." Since D&C 77:6-7 suggests that the seven seals represent the whole of the world's history in seven 1,000-year periods, we might call this the "dispensationalist" approach. Given that according to this view the material in Revelation sweeps through the whole of human history, this suggests that portions of Revelation could be read from a preterist point of view, portions from an historicist point of view, but the bulk of the material from a futurist point of view (with perhaps a little allegorizing thrown in for good measure).

But are we bound to read Revelation that way? If there is relevant material in D&C 77, or 29, or 88, does that material in all events take precedence over how we may read the text?

The reason I am raising this issue is that it will affect profoundly how we read our given text, since much of that text has to do with something called the *New Jerusalem*. The idea of a New Jerusalem has a specific meaning in traditional Mormon sources. As summarized in McConkie, *DNTC*, 3:580-81 (and quoted in the Institute Manual):

To envision what is meant by this title [i.e., New Jerusalem], we must know these five facts:

1. Ancient Jerusalem, the city of much of our Lord's personal ministry among men, shall be rebuilt in the last days and become one of the two great world capitals, a millennial city from which the word of the Lord shall go forth.
2. A New Jerusalem, a new Zion, a city of God shall be built on the American continent.
3. Enoch's city, the original Zion, "the City of Holiness. . . . was taken up into heaven." (Moses 7:13-21)
4. Enoch's city, with its translated inhabitants now in their resurrected state, shall return, as a New Jerusalem, to join with the city of the same name which has been built on the American continent.
5. When the earth becomes a celestial sphere "that great city, the holy Jerusalem," shall again descend "out of heaven from God," as this earth becomes the abode of celestial beings forever. (Rev. 21:10-27)

So my question to you is, to what extent are we bound by this schema in discussing the New Jerusalem of our Revelation chapters? Do we need to relate it in some material way to, say, Jackson County, Missouri? Why or why not?

2. The second issue for reflection I would like to roll out there is whether the traditional ordering of the material in our chapters is completely messed up.

I happen to have in my home library two different commentaries on Revelation: the two-volume International Critical Commentary by R.H. Charles and the Anchor Bible volume by J. Massyngberde Ford, which I bought used at a terrific religion used book store called Loomis near Minneapolis. I wanted to read through what these commentaries had to say on our selected chapters. Boy, was that a frustrating experience! Both commentaries assume that the original order and structure of this material was different than the traditional order, and so they present their commentary material in their posited order. It was very frustrating trying to locate particular verses this way. But my question is, is this German scholarship run amuck (especially given the lack of any textual evidence for these theories), or do we think there may actually be something to this conjecture?

The Anchor Bible volume has a two-page excursus at pp. 38-39 explaining this, under the caption "The Last Two Chapters." (This caption is a mistake; it is clear from the discussion that the author means the last three chapters. My guess is that he visually saw chapters 20-22 mathematically as 22-20=2, but of course chapters 20-22 inclusively totals three chapters, not two.) Ford points out that the text in various places in chapter 20 seems to fit badly. For example, the future tense occurs in 20:7, "Satan will be released," but then two verses later the past tense is used, where Gog and Magog and their forces "marched" and "surrounded." He gives several further examples.

The textual difficulties in chapters 21 and 22 are even greater. In particular, there are two different descriptions of the New Jerusalem that conflict with one another. At this point, I'll quote Ford:

P. Gaechter concludes that there are two new Jerusalems, one which coexists with the present world (21:9-22:2) and one which is eternal (21:1-4c, 22:3-5). the former will last until the disappearance of this heaven and this earth, and will then be replaced by the latter. The eternal city is the same as the temporal but it is transformed. According to Gaechter, the two descriptions follow one another in the wrong order. The description of the city which is of this earth should come before that of the eternal city: 21:9-22:2 and then 21:1-4c with 22:3-5. Gaechter also believes that the duration of the city on earth corresponds to the thousand years and the period of the chaining and imprisonment of Satan. When Satan is chained the way is opened for the conversion of the nations which the millennial Jerusalem resupposes; 20:3, cf. 21:4.

Gaechter suggests a triplet: 20:1-3, the chaining of Satan "for a thousand years"; 21:1-22:2, the millennial Jerusalem; 20:4-6, Christ and his saints reigning "for a thousand years." He brings chs. 20-22 into close relationship to Rev. 12. The millennial Jerusalem is the woman who is protected from Satan by his imprisonment. After the millennium there is another triplet of scenes: 20:7-10, Satan's release, last onslaught, and final ruin; 20:11-15, the last judgment and the condemnation of the wicked; 21:1-4c, 22:3-5, the eternal Jerusalem.

The book ends with the conclusion of the visions (22:7b, 10-13, 16b-17b, 20) of the epistle (22:21) and of the prophecy itself (22:18-19). the present writer believes that 22:16a, 20b, 21 are Christian interpolations akin to chs. 1-3. . . .

So the revised order is something like this:

Satan's chaining 20:1-3
Millennial Jerusalem 21:9-22:2, 22:14-15 *clausulae*
Millennial Kingdom 20:4-6
Satan Unchained 20:7-10
Last Judgment 20:11-15
Eternal Jerusalem 21:1-4c, 22:3-5, 21:5ab, 4d, 5c-6, 7 *clausulae*
Conclusion of the Visions 22:10-13, 7b, 16b-17b, 20
Conclusion of the Epistle 22:21
Conclusion of the Book 22:18-19

So what do you think about this? The revised order makes sense, but is it necessary? Do you buy that it is original?

And again, feel free to roll out any other broad issues for reflection you would like the group to consider.

Posted by [Kevin Barney](#) at **10:41 AM**

14 comments:

1.



Julie M. Smith May 10, 2009 at 7:03 PM

Kevin, thank you so much for getting the ball rolling. This is a fabulous post with all sorts of interesting things to think about.

My thoughts on your thoughts:

You ask, "So does a modern Mormon student have leave to conclude that the Apostle John was not the author of Revelation, the Book of Mormon passages notwithstanding? Why or why not?"

The answer to that question might be tied up in one's theory of translation of the Book of Mormon. I would ask this question in return: Are there any instances when our identification of

the author makes a substantive difference in our interpretation of the book? (And I ask that as an honest question, not as a disguised argument.) If there aren't, we may be able to avoid wading into this very large can of worms . . .

You ask, "But are we bound to read Revelation that way? If there is relevant material in D&C 77, or 29, or 88, does that material in all events take precedence over how we may read the text?"

Such great questions! My own sense is that the best option is something different than any of the ones that you suggest. We might instead focus on the word "signified" in 1:1 as a key word to understanding what exactly the author was writing (i.e., what genre). The Revelation is "signified," that is, presented in signs or symbols. The reader has to work to determine whether the signs refer to events in John's present, John's future (but our past), our future, or more than one time period.

In other words, I think that all of the main schools of thought are too restrictive; the only blanket assumption we can make about Revelation is that the material will be presented symbolically.

I don't see anything in any of the D & C sections that wouldn't mesh with what I've laid out above and I see support for this reading from, for example, D & C 77:2 leading out with the idea that the beasts are "figurative expressions."

I'm not sure that the reader any more obligated to take the "thousand years" mentioned in D & C 77:7 literally than we take the "six days" of v12.

I agree that "the material in Revelation sweeps through the whole of human history," but I am not convinced that the presentation of the material in Revelation is literal or chronological.

"So my question to you is, to what extent are we bound by this schema in discussing the New Jerusalem of our Revelation chapters? Do we need to relate it in some material way to, say, Jackson County, Missouri? Why or why not?"

My sense is that if we are to err in reading Revelation, we should err on the side of a "too symbolic" reading instead of a "too literal" one. If we go too literal, we run the risk of missing the deeper meaning of the Revelation. If we go too symbolic . . . well, I'm guessing we'll know what the score is if we stumble upon a beast with seven heads some day, so no damage will have been done. :)

"But my question is, is this German scholarship run amuck (especially given the lack of any textual evidence for these theories), or do we think there may actually be something to this conjecture?"

I haven't read either of those (well, I read parts of the Anchor but that was over a decade ago . . .), but I recently read Beale's NIGTC and Mounce's NICNT and I can't remember either of them dwelling on that issue. I am suspicious of proposed textual changes without manuscript support, because it is so much easier to claim that the text is out of order than to figure out why the author might have ordered the material as it is. ;)

"My guess is that he visually saw chapters 20-22 mathematically as $22-20=2$, but of course chapters 20-22 inclusively totals three chapters, not two."

This always gives me headaches, but math was never my strong suit. . .

Thanks again, Kevin, for some thought-provoking questions.

Reply

2.



Kevin Barney May 10, 2009 at 7:40 PM

Excellent responses, Julie!

Reply

3.



Adam S. Miller May 13, 2009 at 8:06 AM

Kevin,

I agree with Julie that you've provided for us here an excellent set of opening questions. Nice work!

As it turns out, I think that I agree with practically all of Julie's responses.

1. You ask if, as Mormons, we should feel compelled to conclude that the author of Revelation was the apostle John. Julie responds:

"The answer to that question might be tied up in one's theory of translation of the Book of Mormon." I think that this is right. We may feel compelled to give it an extra hard look, but it seems to me to be a reasonable option to conclude that Joseph Smith may have had a relatively "constructive" part to play in translating the text (rather than simply translating it word for word) and, if so, then it would be acceptable to conclude that the ascription of the book's authorship to John may be an (inconsequential?) contribution made by Joseph himself.

2. You ask:

"If there is relevant material in D&C 77, or 29, or 88, does that material in all events take precedence over how we may read the text?" I think that we should approach these sections as important resources for Revelation, especially if we are primarily interested in producing a reading of the text that is "doctrinal" or institutionally normative.

However, I think that the primary text is more than sufficiently rich to allow for a variety of theologically productive readings. Perhaps I'll send through the email list a brief article from our work on the Alma 32 seminar where I try to describe, in general, the kind of "theological" freedom we have in approaching a scriptural text.

With respect to the text's over-abundance of meaning, I think that Julie's right on the money when she says that:

"I think that all of the main schools of thought are too restrictive; the only blanket assumption we can make about Revelation is that the material will be presented symbolically." Julie also says:

"I am not convinced that the presentation of the material in Revelation is literal or chronological." I agree, but would amend this just slightly and say that I'm not convinced that the presentation of material in Revelation is either *just* literal or *just* chronological. I don't want to rule these possibilities out - though, for my part, I intend to err with Julie on the side of being too symbolic (and "existential") rather than too literal.

3. These things being said, I'd like to add a note/question of my own.

In past seminars we've found it to be very helpful to collaboratively generate (before we start reading the text) a short list of questions that interest us. I'd like to propose a couple (in addition to those already raised by Kevin) that interest me. Sorry that they are a bit obviously philosophical in spirit – blame Julie for inviting me :)

- a. What does the term “new” mean in Rev 21-22?
- b. What can we say about what a “symbol” is or does *on the basis* of Rev 21-22?
- c. Why do numbers play such an important role in Rev 21-22?

Please add to this list with your own general questions!

My best,
Adam

[Reply](#)



[Adam S. Miller](#) **May 13, 2009 at 9:19 AM**

This comment has been removed by the author.

[Reply](#)



[Adam S. Miller](#) **May 13, 2009 at 10:44 AM**

Disregard the last comment or two. I'm just seeing if I can get the recent comments widget to work.

[Reply](#)



[Julie M. Smith](#) **May 15, 2009 at 6:21 AM**

The following is from Eric Huntsman, who is having some posting difficulties at this time.

Eric's comments:

"A few initial thoughts. First of all, on the authorship issue there is another outside possibility that might be worth at least considering: the apostle John might, in fact, have been the author of Revelation and NOT necessarily the "author," in the modern sense, of the other works in the Johannine corpus. The quality of the Greek itself, heavily semiticized and exhibiting grammatical difficulties, seems more like the work of a Jew with little or poor Greek. Without bringing in the whole issue of the compositional theories surrounding the Fourth Gospel, perhaps John was the

BD (Beloved Disciple, a point still largely argued) but not the FE (Fourth Evangelist) or final editor(s). 1 John has thematic and literary similarities with the Fourth Gospel, but nothing clearly connects 2 and 3 John except the postulated Sitz im Leben.

As Book of Mormon readings clearly impact the authorship issue for most Latter-day Saints, D&C 77 similarly affects how many of us feel that we need to look at interpretive approaches to Revelation. However, one could argue that this dispensationalist approach applies solely to Revelation 4-11, the visions in or connected to the seven sealed scroll. This is a tightly structured inclusio, with the open door in heaven at the beginning and the open temple at the end. While 12:1-22:7 can be seen as a restatement of the same basic events and issues, I do not know that the dispensationalist approach necessarily obtains in the block of text that we will be looking at.

Finally, I may be guilty of compartmentalizing, but I think that there is utility in examining the text in its own context fully and independently before bringing in outside material to inform our interpretation. I always have my students do strict exegesis first, looking at the text itself and allowing only texts that the author had at the time of the composition (in this case Ezekiel, Zechariah, Daniel, etc.) affect done can they then, as an exercise of exposition, reflection, and application, bring in later scripture, restoration theology, and statements by authorities. I know that we cannot totally escape our world view and belief structures, but it is useful in a class setting, at least, to challenge students to engage the text itself.

That said, this is an LDS-oriented blog, and I have a personal interest in working to bring exegesis and exposition together. I simply reviewed this elementary approach, because my preference is to examine the text first and then shape is in subsequent readings and discussions. Also pardon the undigested nature of my first comments here; I am operating under extreme jet lag and 3 hours of sleep!"

Reply

7.



Adam S. Miller May 15, 2009 at 9:12 AM

1. Eric says:

"There is another outside possibility that might be worth at least considering: the apostle John might, in fact, have been the author of Revelation and NOT necessarily the "author," in the modern sense, of the other works in the Johannine corpus."Nice point.

2. Eric also says:

"I always have my students do strict exegesis first, looking at the text itself and allowing only texts that the author had at the time of the composition . . . I know that we cannot totally escape our world view and belief structures, but it is useful in a class setting, at least, to challenge students to engage the text itself."I agree entirely that this is essential. Hopefully doing this kind of very close textual work together will be one of the joys of this seminar.

Reply

8.



Shon Hopkin May 17, 2009 at 4:37 PM

Hello to all,

What a wonderful opportunity to touch minds on this topic. Thanks to Julie for setting all of this up, to Adam for the original concept, and to Kevin for setting the stage for us.

I'd like to respond to a couple of issues mentioned by Kevin and developed further in the responses. (And I hope all will forgive my lack of formatting knowledge in blog-world.)

1. As Kevin asked: "To what extent are we constrained in our readings by modern scripture?"

Eric responded to this question: "Finally, I may be guilty of compartmentalizing, but I think that there is utility in examining the text in its own context fully and independently before bringing in outside material to inform our interpretation."

I completely agree with this statement by Eric. First we need to immerse ourselves in the text itself and let it speak in its own voice, as much as possible. However, as Eric mentioned, it is difficult to let the text speak for itself when our own previous viewpoints and backgrounds are so inextricably interwoven into the way we view the text (although this doesn't absolve us from trying). We are at even greater difficulty when we start to look at the context, or the set of historical circumstances surrounding the text. Immediately we are dependent upon outside readings and assumptions, and it is important to remember that our thinking is affected by them all: the viewpoints and biases of historians of that time period (depending on exactly what time period we believe we're looking at), the methods of analyzing ancient languages and ancient authors that we have received from other scholars, the viewpoints of modern biblical scholarship from the past couple of centuries, etc.

My experience has been that LDS scholars of scripture are often more deeply affected and influenced by scholarship and viewpoints outside of modern LDS scripture than other LDS members. This is not surprising, given their increased level of study, nor is it necessarily a negative, as it allows the LDS scholar to present insights, issues, and thoughts to LDS membership that have been gleaned from many good minds and much good research.

However, in response to Kevin's original question, I think that in this setting it is important that modern scripture should color the way in which we understand all other thinking about the "context" of the scripture text. Modern scripture can act as an effective check and balance to our own thinking, and can reveal to us when we have possibly absorbed too many other influences outside of the scripture text. This point is likely very elementary, but bears mentioning, I believe.

On the other hand, if we are to use modern LDS scripture to inform our reading of Revelation, the question still needs to be asked whether we understand modern scripture correctly, or whether our understanding of modern scripture has been taken too casually, having accepted inherited interpretations without a second thought. For example, with regards to Nephi's identification of the writer of Revelation as John, a cursory reading would indicate that we are constrained to see the author of Revelation as the apostle John with whom we are familiar in the gospels. However, further thought and study offers a number of other possibilities, one of them mentioned by Adam in his response. Another possibility exists that Nephi uses the term "apostle" in the broader context of the word, "one sent forth," as one given a specific mission to testify of Christ, as the author of Revelation does (Rev. 1:9, 19:10), and not to identify John with the apostle from the gospels. While the identification of the author of Revelation with the apostle John of the gospels stills seems the best understanding of 1 Nephi to me, other possibilities do exist. The same can be said for how we typically understand D&C 77 (and other modern scriptures), as Eric shows in his response about the seven dispensational seals in Revelation.

2. Should our analysis tend toward a symbolic or literal interpretation of our text? I appreciate Julie's viewpoint in this area, augmented by Adam's statement: "I'm not convinced that the presentation of material in Revelation is either just literal or just chronological. I don't want to

rule these possibilities out - though, for my part, I intend to err with Julie on the side of being too symbolic... rather than too literal."

I find additional support for this stance in Joseph Smith's discussion of Revelation, which he only took up towards the end of his life because an LDS member (Elder Brown) had interpreted sections of the text too literally, and had erred in his interpretations. In response to this, Joseph stated:

"I have seldom spoken from the revelations; but as my subject is a constant source of speculation amongst the elders, causing a division of sentiment and opinion in relation to it, I now do it in order that division and difference of opinion may be done away with." (History of the Church, 5:339-40)

Later in the same discourse he stated: "I make this broad declaration, that where God ever gives a vision of an image, or beast, or figure of any kind, he always holds himself responsible to give a revelation or interpretation of the meaning thereof, otherwise we are not responsible or accountable for our belief in it. Don't be afraid of being damned for not knowing the meaning of a vision or figure where God has not given a revelation or interpretation on the subject." (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 290)

In his own discussion of Revelation, Joseph at times used his prophetic prerogative to give literal interpretations, such as his declaration that the animals in Revelation 5 show that there are animals in heaven (see Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 290). However, as illustrated by Julie above in the wording of D&C 77:2a, his interpretations just as often treated the images in Revelation as figurative.

There is a tendency for us to want immediate, one-to-one, literal interpretations of all things in Revelation so that we can check it off as understood and leave it behind. However, assigning literal interpretations would often miss the point of Revelation: the images there are meant to teach the serious reader important lessons about the battle of good versus evil and about God's plan for His children. The use of symbolic language offers a depth of interconnected meanings for the text that can invite deeper understanding of the principles of the gospel. The understanding of these principles is at least as important, and possibly more important, than any literal, one-to-one equivalent that we might assign to the text.

So, while we may need to pay some attention to what specific New Jerusalem the text is referring to, it will probably be more important for us to discuss why Revelation includes a description of the New Jerusalem (instead of the myriad of other ways to describe a victory of good over evil), why it describes the specific elements of the New Jerusalem as it does (instead of the myriad of other elements that could exist in a description of the heavenly city), and why the description of the New Jerusalem takes such a prominent place at the end of the book.

These promise to be exciting discussions. I'm looking forward to getting into the text next week and seeing what it has to offer.

Best,
Shon Hopkin

Reply



9.

Eric D. Huntsman May 18, 2009 at 1:41 PM

In response to Julie's "I think that all of the main schools of thought are too restrictive; the only blanket assumption we can make about Revelation is that the material will be presented symbolically."

I agree . . . for the most part. Views on the structure of Revelation differ, particularly on the question of whether the visions in Rev 4-11 and 12-22 cover the same material but from different perspectives or whether they actually constitute two different sets of material with only some overlap (e.g., are the 7 trumpet judgments of 8:7-11:18 the same as 7 bowls of 16:1-21).

I tend to see some visions as being *primarily* preterist, historicist, or futurist, but the the overarching importance of them can always be taken symbolically. Accordingly, even though a more-or-less "straightforward" reading of D&C 77 would tend to incline many LDS readers to interpret the seven seals of 6:1-11:18 eclectically (first four seals as preterist, fifth seal as contemporaneous with the seer, some of the sixth as historicist, and the rest of the sixth and seventh as futurist), the fact is that the kind of judgments and destructions that are emphasized in each dispensation in fact happen in all (famine would not be limited to the third, for instance) and are most important in terms of seeing God's judgment on the wicked and his vindication of his saints.

I tend to see the Second Revelatory Experience of 12:1–22:5 as having its primary fulfillment in the eschatological future (the dicey issue of LDS interpretations of ch. 12 notwithstanding), but the symbolic value of these visions made still gave them significance for Revelation's original audience, for people in the middle ages, and for us, even if we are not as close to the "winding up scene" as many assume.

Reply

10.



Eric D. Huntsman May 18, 2009 at 1:46 PM

A few more preliminaries.

Since some of our readers may be new to the study of Revelation, I thought it might be useful to post a few working points or characterizations, which I do not intend to be definitive or dogmatic:

Attributed Author: "John" (1:1, 4, 9), a Jewish-Christian prophet; early patristic evidence and latter-day revelation tend to confirm his identity as the apostle John, son of Zebedee and brother of James. Later patristic evidence identified him with a separate "elder," and much modern scholarship tries to question the traditional identification.

Date: Either late in the reign of Nero (c. A.D. 64–68) or, more probably, in the later phases of the reign of Domitian (c. A.D. 92–96)

To: "Seven Churches" in Asia Minor (1:4; 2:1–22)

From: Island of Patmos, perhaps put in final form in the Roman Province of Asia (possibly the city of Ephesus itself)

Unity and Integrity: a single work, but possible composed in stages, incorporating some older apocalyptic materials; some scholars see two apocalypses have been joined.

Literary Genre: an "apocalypse" (1:1; 4:1), with an epistolary frame (letter-like introduction and

conclusion – 1:4; 22:21)

Language: highly symbolic Greek, including some Semitic influences

Purpose: to encourage Christians to preserve faith in the midst of trials and tribulations (cf. 13:10b; 14:12); to reveal the full glory and majesty of Christ in his role as Judge and King and illustrate his role in human history (past and present as well as future).

One overview of its structure:

Prologue (1:1–3)

Letters to the Seven Churches (1:4–3:22), including John’s “inaugural vision” in 1:9–20

First Revelatory Experience (4:1–11:19)

- The Opened Door in Heaven (4:1a)
- Vision of the Heavenly Court: God and the Lamb (4:1b–11)
- The Seven–Sealed Scroll (5:1–11:19)
- The Scroll and the Lamb (5:1–14)
- Opening the First Six Seals (6:1–7:17)
- Seventh Seal and the Seven Trumpets (8:1–11:18)
- The Opened Temple in Heaven (11:19)

Second Revelatory Experience (12:1–22:5)

- The Woman, Child, and Dragon (12:1–17)
- The Demonic Trinity: Dragon and Two Beasts (12:18–14:20)
- The Lamb and His Servants (14:1–20)
- Seven Plagues and Seven Bowls (15:1–16:21)
- Judgment on Babylon, the Great Harlot (17:1–19:10)
- Victory of Christ (19:11–20:15)
- New Heaven and New Earth (21:1–22:5)

The Letter Resumes: Epilogue and Blessing (22:6–21)

Reply

11.



Eric D. Huntsman May 18, 2009 at 2:37 PM

Kevin noted the commentaries by Charles and Ford that he has referred to. I thought that I would list a few reference works, since I may refer to them in my first foray into blog commentary this week as I begin to treat 21:1–4.

Introductions:

Four Views on the Book of Revelation, edited by C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

Bruce R. Metzger, Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary, edited by Steve Gregg (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997. [this useful reference summarizes the approaches of the four interpretive schools

pericope by pericope]

Scholarly references and commentaries:

G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, Anchor Bible 38 (New York: Doubleday, 1975).

[Ford advanced the idea that the John of Revelation was actually John the Baptist, and that the apocalypse was later reshaped by a Christian editor . . . while anecdotal comments suggest that she abandoned this position, I always thought that it was interesting given the way Nephi received an expanded version of Lehi's dream and wondered about the possibility of a connection between JBaptist and John the Beloved]

Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).

LDS references:

Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, vol 3: Colossians - Revelation (SLC: Bookcraft, 1973).

Richard Draper, *Opening the Seven Seals: The visions of John the Revelator* (SLC: Deseret Book, 1991).

Does anyone know of any other LDS commentaries? I provided the chapter on Revelation in *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament*, but it was only meant as an introductory overview and not a sustained, careful analysis.

Reply

12.



Brandie Siegfried May 18, 2009 at 5:30 PM

I have very much enjoyed reading the various responses to Kevin's initial set of questions. I have found your thoughts to be both enlightening and enjoyably provocative of further thought. Below, I return to a few of Kevin's first queries by way of Adam and Shon's recent responses, but do so most directly by taking up a few points made by Julie, and as an amplification of a point made yesterday by Eric.

First, to the question of being constrained in our readings by modern scripture's assertions regarding a literal New Jerusalem:

In addition to what has already been said, I would suggest that the material manifestation of the ideal represented by the New Jerusalem is always preceded by the City of God plotted in the charitable deeds of believers. Relationships also make up a city, even before land is chosen, buildings and streets constructed. That is, before Christian disciples will ever dwell in a literal New Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem will first have to dwell in their hearts and take shape in their actions. Modern scripture is equally clear on this idea – Enoch's city was taken into a final form of divine approbation well after the deeds of its inhabitants had erased violence, poverty, pride, and various forms of human suffering. So in addition to exploring, from a theological

perspective, the various symbolic possibilities of Revelation, I would want to be constantly thinking about those possibilities as being intimate with the material (and in this sense, literal) discipleship or behaviors-of-heart that make up any Jerusalem worth having. In other words, though we have good reasons to be cautious about reading any or part of the text literally, we might want to freely extrapolate theological points from literal behaviors the text is meant to nurture or inspire.

Second, in response to the Ford and Gaechter material:

The suggestion that there are always two new Jerusalems, one co-existing with the present world, and one which is eternal, accords well with the belief I've expressed above. However, the business of working out a "correct" narrative order for Revelation is not, in answer to Kevin's question about its necessity, essential to the kind of invitation extended to us by the genres of the book (I'll come back to this in a moment). Moreover, the use of tense as textual evidence for there having been an original, or "correct" ordering of visionary events is weak. At the very least, such an assertion is laced with complications. Writers in many languages shift tense not only to signify a change of scene-in-time, but to other rhetorical ends as well. For instance, a shift in from past to present tense might be used to create thematic emphasis, or to underscore the special relevance of a particular symbol. A shift to the past from the present tense might be meant to encourage intellectual distancing (for critical perspective), and moving again to present tense might encourage emotional immediacy or intimacy (especially when requiring a close identification with an ancient or traditional symbol). Moreover, cultures have narrative traditions and expectations for how present tense might be used to recount a past event (for instance, Spanish is different from English, in this regard). In other words, though we needn't dismiss the possibility of a need to correct the current form of the narrative, doing so would require considerably more rhetorical analysis and explication than we would be able to accomplish within the parameters of our seminar. Or rather, it would fall to those whose knowledge of Greek and its narrative traditions (or linguistic games) is best suited to such an analysis. Third, to return to something Julie said earlier:

Focusing on "signified" in 1:1 (particularly as a key word for understanding what the author was writing) is an excellent idea, and I am especially enamored of doing so in relation to the narrative's flirtations with time. Eric's latest response is also useful in this regard. He notes that symbolic readings are especially powerful (I might add, "alive") because they are useful in recognizing relevance and meaning for any time. Attention to genre is similarly useful, and I want to add a set of readerly questions to our growing list: in addition to what Eric has suggested, what other genres are used in the passages we're attending to? How do they direct the course of meaning? Do they invite special expectations which can then be put to particular use? To what extent do such genres carry over successfully to our own time, and is there further "translation" to be done in this regard?

Fourth, in response to Adam's delicious questions regarding why numbers play such an important role in Revelations:

I can't help but think of Pythagorean influences, here, as well as the Hebraic tradition. P-inflected assumptions might suggest that numbers invite a sense of rectitude, clarity, and transcendence, as well as a strong assurance that there are relationships of direct correspondence in representation. If so, then we have at the heart of the text an engaging (and perhaps "playful" in the serious sense) paradox. The kind of truth invoked by numbers (eternal, stable, and unchanging) is asserted even as the truth of poetical language throws meaning toward an ever-receding horizon of amplification and interpretative possibility (contingent on readers, cultures, and the effects of mutability). As much as this possibility delights me, I admit that it breaks down a bit if we take into account that in the Hebrew/Jewish literary tradition, numbers are poetical. But that poses other interesting possibilities for us to think about. If the writer was hoping to put both traditions into play simultaneously, we have a remarkably complex literary device – one that simultaneously resists interpretative closure, while perhaps framing, highlighting, "revealing," what otherwise might have remained hidden.

Fifth, as a final contribution to our list of questions:

I can't help but wonder to what extent English translation has inflected (or not) the images we'll be discussing. I'm especially interested in how glosses to the English text tend toward denotative meanings of the Greek. What, I wonder, are the crucial connotative meanings that bear on the symbolic? And do some of these images grow out of idiomatic expressions useful to our theological explorations?

[Reply](#)

13.



Kevin Barney May 18, 2009 at 6:15 PM

Eric, thank you for setting out some of the basics for us; I think that is very helpful for our readers. As to your question on other LDS commentary, here is a list of LDS resources on Revelation:

“Book of Revelation Overview.” Ensign 15 (Oct. 1983): 50-53.

Draper, Richard D. *Opening the Seven Seals: The Visions of John the Revelator*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991.

Lund, Gerald N. “Seeing the Book of Revelation as a Book of Revelation.” Ensign 17 (Dec. 1987): 46-52.

Lund, Gerald N. “Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass.” *Studies in Scripture Vol. 6: Acts to Revelation*. Ed. by Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987, 6:256-75.

Mackay, Thomas W. “Early Christian Millenarianist Interpretation of the Two Witnesses in John’s Apocalypse 11:3-13.” In *By Study and Also By Faith*, ed. by John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, 222-331. Vol. 1. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990.

Maxwell, Robert L. [Review of both Parry and Parry and Smith.] *BYU Studies* 38/3 (1999).

Parry, Donald W. and Jay A. Parry. *Understanding the Book of Revelation*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998.

Parry, Jay A. and Donald W. Parry. “The Temple in Heaven: Its Description and Significance.” In *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. by Donald W. Parry, 515-32. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994.

Smith, Mick. *The Book of Revelation: Plain, Pure, and Simple*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998.

Wilcox, Michael S. *The Writings of John: St. John, the Epistles, the Revelation*. Orem, Utah: Randall Books, 1987.

Brandie, I'm intrigued by your last point on the influence of translation. That's something I think I'll try to keep an eye on as we progress through the reading.

[Reply](#)

14.



Adam S. Miller May 18, 2009 at 6:30 PM

Just a note, first of all, that I don't believe I've gotten the "recent comments" widget in the sidebar to work yet. I'm holding out hope that it may start functioning with Eric's post. For the time being, though, don't trust it!

Thanks, Eric, for the brief overview and, especially, for pointing out some helpful reference materials. As a novice with this particular text, I'm be grateful for all such suggestions.

Also, excellent point, Shon, about the need to not assume that we've *already* correctly read the meaning of *modern* revelations that touch on Revelation.

And thanks, as well, Brandie, for your comments about numbers. I'm anxious to see how this all plays out in our reading. Also, you nicely summarize the *exact* approach I hope to take over the next few months when you say:

"So in addition to exploring, from a theological perspective, the various symbolic possibilities of Revelation, I would want to be constantly thinking about those possibilities **as being intimate with the material . . . discipleship or behaviors-of-heart that make up any Jerusalem worth having**. In other words, though we have good reasons to be cautious about reading any or part of the text literally, we might want to freely extrapolate theological points from literal behaviors the text is meant to nurture or inspire."

Reply

Interpretive Approaches to Revelation (A Review Summary)

While the prologue (1:1-9), John's inaugural vision of Christ (1:10-18), and the visions for the seven churches (1:20-3:22) are seen as being "things which are," the balance of the apocalypse until the resumption of the epistolary frame in 22:8-21 focuses on things which "shall be hereafter" (1:19; cf. 22:6, where "things which must shortly be done" has raised the whole question of the timing of the events of Revelation!).

Of these "future events," those revolving around the judgment of the wicked and the vindication of the righteous in Revelation 4-19 have typically been approached in one of the following ways (see Gregg, 34-46; Pate, 19-28):

- **Preterist:** events in the visions seen by "John" are symbolic representations of events before or contemporary with his time: e.g., the fall of Babylon represents the fall of Jerusalem in the Roman-Jewish War of A.D. 66-72.
- **Historicist:** events in the visions occur after John but before the time of modern readers: e.g., the fall of Babylon represents the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century or the near-fall of the Roman papacy in the Reformation.
- **Idealist:** the events in John's visions are symbolic of greater, eternal truths (e.g., the ultimate victory of God over evil) and illustrate recurring themes. As a result, the visions do not necessarily have clear temporal or spatial connections. This is, perhaps surprisingly, an ancient exegetical approach, beginning with some early Church Fathers who were influenced by Philo's allegorical interpretation of the Jewish scriptures.

- **Futurist:** these prophecies have yet to be fulfilled and most will occur in the period leading up to the glorious return of Jesus: e.g., the fall of Babylon represents either the destruction of a single, worldly city or the worldly system in general.
- **Classical Dispensationalism** is a particular branch of the futurist school which distinguishes between OT Israel and the NT Church, is premillennialist, and usually espouses a pretribulation rapture (the use of "dispensation" here should not be confused with LDS use of the term)
- **Progressive Dispensationalism** applies the "already/not yet" hermeneutic throughout chapters 4-19 in joining aspects of the Idealists and Futurist schools. The Christ event began his heavenly reign and Christians, while living in this fallen world, have citizenship in a heavenly Jerusalem at the same time that they continue to dwell on this earth below. While progressives still look forward to a literal fulfillment of the prophecies in the future, they hold that believers are enjoying them spiritually even now (Pate, 28-34).

The LDS View, at least for the visions opened by the seven-sealed scroll in Revelation 5-11, can be termed **eclectic** inasmuch as each seal represents events of a different "1000-year" period of the earth's history (see the usual reading of D&C 77:6-7). By this argument the first four seals incline towards a preterist interpretation, with some of the events of the fifth seal being contemporary with John's time and others yielding a historicist interpretation. Much of the sixth and all of the seventh, with its seven trumpet judgments could be seen as futurist.

This notwithstanding, the kinds of events that occur in the different "dispensations" (using the standard LDS meaning of the term) are the kind of judgments that happen in every age, suggesting that an Idealist approach is not out of order. I will also argue that a Progressive Dispensationalists approach is particularly useful for Latter-day Saints, allowing them to appreciate the strengths of both the Idealist and Future schools, both in Revelation 9-19 and especially in chapters 20-22, much of which we are covering in this seminar.

Other terms useful for the final chapters of Revelation include the following:

- **Premillennialist:** Christ comes before the Millennium to effect the binding of Satan and the inauguration of the 1,000 year reign. This period ends with a final battle, judgment, and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.
- **Amillennialist:** The binding of Satan began with the ministry of Jesus and was accomplished by his death and resurrection. The 1,000 years is an indeterminate period approximating the "Church Age"
- **Postmillennialists:** the binding of Satan and the establishment of peace is accomplished by Christ through his Church, that is through the successful preaching of the gospel. The 1,000 years may or may not be a literal period of time.

Despite differences on the "millennium," only discussed in Revelation 20, most commentators accept the concept of "a new heaven and a new earth," whether an actual new creation, a renewed creation, or a spiritual creation. The nature of the new heaven, new earth, and new Jerusalem is often approached in three different ways (see Gregg, 186-488):

- The **Literal**, propounded largely by futurists and especially classical dispensationalists, sees chapters 21-22 as accurately describing the creation at the end of time.
- The **Spiritual** applies these visions to a spiritual new creation, the Church, which exists here and now. This fits with the Idealists and Progressive Dispensationalists approach used for the earlier chapters.

- The **Symbolic** applies to the vision in these chapters as referring to heaven, i.e. symbolizes not this earth but the saints heavenly home.

Revelation 21:1-5a

1And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. 2And I John saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people[s], and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. 4And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." 5aAnd he that sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."

EXEGESIS

This pericope is the first part of John's vision of a New Heaven and New Earth (21:1–22:5), which in turn concludes John's second set of visions, portents seen from an earthly perspective (12:1–22:5) as opposed to his first vision, which was seen from a heavenly vantage point (4:1–11:19). I have elected to include 5a, "And he that say upon the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new,'" with verses 1–4 because the repetition of "new" (*kainon* and *kainen* in v.1 and *kaina* in v. 5a) creates a clear *inclusio* and because of the resonance with God's verbal creation in Gen 1:1–31.

This passage is the first of two pericopes describing the new Jerusalem, the other being 21:9–22:5. Gaechter, who called the ordering of the final chapters of Revelation into question, linked these verses with 22:3–5 as a description of the eternal city and proposed that 21:9–22:2 signifies the spiritual Jerusalem (sc. the church) that coexists with this present world (see Ford, 38–39). While this position has been alluded to by Kevin and is amenable to progressive dispensationalists, it is by no means certain that two Jerusalems were, in fact, intended.

This passage, as with most of the visions in 12:1–22:5 constitutes a vision report, as distinct from the ascension that is the setting for those of 4:1–11:19. There is an emphasis on seeing and hearing, but in each case John sees and hears from a position outside of heaven (although in this last case technically not from an earthly vantage point, since the old earth and heaven had fled from God's face in 20:11). The seer sees the holy city "coming down from heaven" and hears a voice "out of heaven." One interpretive approach is that the first set of visions, received during John's ascent into the heavenly court, was received outside of time; he sees the Lamb's role in unfolding history past, present, and future, whereas in the second set, he "experiences" them "on the ground" as they occur (although the timing is still open to interpretation).

Notes

I saw a new heaven and a new earth. In the first sentence there is an immediate echo of Genesis 1:1, "God created the heaven and earth." The word "new" here is the Greek *kainos*, not *neos*. Whereas *neos* is consistently new in the sense of time, ***kainos*, in additional to the temporal sense, can refer to newness in sense of quality and not just time** (see Beale, 1040). The idea of a renewal of the earth was a common feature in apocalyptic literature as in 1 Enoch 45:4–5 (Mounce, 380). Exegetical links connect the passing of the old world the rise of the new directly to pattern of Christ's resurrection (cf. 2 Cor 5:4–17; Col 1:15–18).

for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away. As noted, the old earth and heaven fled from the face of God when he sat upon the great white throne (20:11), much as man was driven out of the presence of God in Genesis 3:24. Whereas the verb in 20:11 is stronger (*ephygen* or "fled"), ***apēlthan* in 21:1 does have more of the sense of "go away from" than the simple English "pass away."**

there was no more sea. While perhaps perplexing to modern readers, the lack of a sea in the new earth should be seen from an ancient, Near Eastern perspective, where it represented the roiling powers of chaos (cf. Tiamat, who was slain by Marduk, and from whose corpse the dry land was created, Mounce, 381; Beale, 1041–1047, 1050–1051). **Hence the lack of a sea reflects the lack of any kind of Satanic or chaotic influence in the new creation.** Consider also connections with Jesus' stilling of the sea in the gospels.

And I John saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem. The earliest references to a new Jerusalem (outside of Ether 13!) seem to be Ezekiel 48:30–35 and Testament of Dan (Mounce, 381). "New" Jerusalem may have a connection with Isa 62:1–5, where Zion/Jerusalem is called by a new name and depicted as a bride (Beale, 1044).

Coming down from God out of heaven. Although the lexical parallels are not exact, references to Jesus being and coming “from above” (e.g., John 3:3, 31; 8:23) and the city’s coming down “out of heaven from God” (a more precise rendering of *ek ouranou apo tou theou*) does suggest a connection. **The sense here may also refer to the source or quality of the new Jerusalem and not just the place of its spatial origin.** Just as Christ came down from heaven, so too will the new Jerusalem. Indeed, elsewhere the heavenly Jerusalem always seems to be somewhere in heaven itself (e.g., Gal 4:26; Heb 12:22–23).

prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Bridal imagery here connects the new Jerusalem both with the Old Testament covenant image of Israel as the spouse of YHWH and New Testament imagery of the Church as the Bride and Christ as the Bridegroom. Isaiah precedents for the city as bride are found in Isa 52:1–3 and 62. Within Revelation itself, the marriage of the Lamb is announced in 19:7–9, and the purity of the new wife appears in direct contrast with the Great Whore of Rev 17.

“Behold, I make all things new.” Just as God ended his creative work in Genesis 2:2 and then blessed it in 2:3 (implying that he spoke a final time), **so the creation of the new heaven and earth is completed when he declares that he has “made” (*poieō*, interestingly present in Greek) all things new.**

Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them. Tabernacle here is the Greek *skene*, simply “tent,” which the LXX used for the wilderness Tabernacle in which YHWH dwelt in the midst of his people. Despite being from different linguistic families, there it also seems to be closely related to the Hebrew *shekinah*, denoting the glory and presence of God (Mounce, 383). **“He will dwell (*skēnōsei*) with them” resonates with John 1:13, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt (*eskēnōsen*) with us.”** See also Ezekiel 37:27 and 43:7.

and they shall be his people[s], and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. A final fulfillment of the OT covenant promise (e.g., Lev 26:11–12; Jer 31:33; Ezek 37:27; Zech 8:8). **Significantly, John modifies the promise to includes peoples (*laoi*) rather than people (*laos*),** a distinction frequently made in modern translations but alas not in the KJV (Beale, 1047).

God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. The reversal of the effects of the fall, realized to some extent with the Millennium of chapter 20, is a fulfillment of promises such as those in Isa 25:8, 35:10. It was promised in Rev 7:16–17.

he that sat upon the throne said. The throne where God sits has been mentioned throughout Revelation but mostly in the portion chronicling John’s ascent (4:2, 9; 5:1, 7; 6:16; 7:10, 15 as opposed to 19:14 and here at 20:4). God’s reticence in the apocalypse is noteworthy; other than here at 21:5, he speaks at 1:8 (although this requires some exegetical efforts for Latter-day Saints) and perhaps at 16:1 and 17 as well (Mounce, 384 n. 23).

“Behold, I make all things new.” Just as God ended his creative work in Genesis 2:2 and then blessed it in 2:3 (implying that he spoke a final time), so the creation of the new heaven and earth is completed when he declares that he has “made” all things new. **Interestingly, as noted the verb *poieō* is actually present tense in Greek, perhaps suggesting that God is in the process of making things new here and now** (see Metzger, 99, supporting an Idealist and Progressive Dispensationalist approach).

Interpreted broadly and without yet subscribing to a particular expositional approach, this pericope illustrates that with ***God’s final victory the earth and heavens are either remade or renewed; the forces of chaos and evil are henceforth absent; the righteous dwell with God in a holy community, perhaps an actual city; and God’s presence effects the end of pain, death, and suffering.*** Indeed, the separation from God that brought these factors into human experience at last comes to an end, with the final chapters of Revelation forming an appropriate pendant to the opening chapters of Genesis in the current canonical order.

EXPOSITION

Standard approaches interpret this pericope literally, spiritually, or symbolically. Many futurists, especially classical dispensationalists, tend to interpret this and the succeeding description of the New Jerusalem very literally. “Spiritual” approaches apply the description of the New Jerusalem to the new, spiritual creation found in the Church, in which is found the real presence of God. Symbolic interpretations see the new earth and the New Jerusalem not so much as a real place on a new earth but as a fantastic description of the final heavenly state of glorified saints.

LDS exposition of “a new heaven and a new earth” tends to be literal but informed and shaped by the idea that just as a man is baptized by water, then by fire, and finally dies and is resurrected, so shall the earth itself. Hence the flood represents water baptism (whether total or token is debated; see White and Thomas, *Dialogue* 40.3 [Fall 2007]); the cleansing of the earth by fire at a premillennial appearance of Jesus represents the sanctification attendant upon the baptism of the Holy Ghost (see D&C 29:23–25; 88:18–19; also McConkie, 580 and *passim*; Draper, 227–228); the “fleeing” of the earth from God’s face in Rev 20:11 represents its death; and the new earth represents its resurrection.

But while LDS interpretation of the concept of a New Jerusalem is often literal, the discussion of multiple Jerusalems in Ether 13—whether yet to be built in the Old World, later to be built in the New, or coming down from heaven as here

(for all of which, see again McConkie, 580–581)—actually suggests that the LDS approach ought to be polyvalent. Saints in every age labor to build a holy community. Sometimes they succeed (Enoch’s Zion, Melchizedek’s Salem), sometimes they fail (Jewish Jerusalem, Mormon Missouri), and often they toil on with the goal still on the horizon. In these instances a Spiritual approach is appropriate, because a spiritual community is trying to realize heaven on earth in this fallen sphere. Further, an LDS literal interpretation is also a symbolic one, inasmuch as the celestialized earth indeed becomes “heaven” for its inhabitants.

In this sense the progressive dispensationalist approach, which allows for both a futurist and symbolic interpretation for some of the same images, ought to be welcome to LDS students of this passage. ***While we look forward not just to Christ’s return at the onset of the Millennium but to God’s return at its end, we continue to labor to create heaven here and now, recognizing that our efforts to build Zion will in fact bring us to the point when our Millennial Zion, Enoch’s Zion, and finally God’s Zion all become one:*** “The Lord hath redeemed his people; And Satan is bound and time is no longer. The Lord hath gathered all things in one. The Lord hath brought down Zion from above. The Lord hath brought Zion from beneath.” (D&C 88:100; cf. Moses 7:63).

Posted by [Eric Huntsman](#) at 11:26 PM

4 comments:

1.



Julie M. Smith May 24, 2009 at 7:50 AM

This is a wonderful post, thank you.

I really like the way in which you have brought Ether 13 into the discussion.

You write, "God’s reticence in the apocalypse is noteworthy; other than here at 21:5, he speaks at 1:8 . . ."

And both v5-6 here and 1:18 contain "alpha and omega," making a nice little bookend--both literally and metaphorically.

A few general comments:

"And he that sat upon the throne said"

I find it interesting how rarely Rev. names deity. (Or, as noted above, has deity speak.) I suspect this is tied into the -visual- nature of the revelation, although I’m having a hard time articulating it.

As a general question, I’m curious what this pericope can teach us about the creation and what the creation (in Gen 1-3) can teach us about this pericope.

"The old earth and heaven fled from the face of God when he sat upon the great white throne (20:11), much as man was driven out of the presence of God in Genesis 3:24." touches on this question, but raises more questions: In what ways is the earth like Adam? (Of course, the language in Gen 1-3 makes the connection itself very clear.) Has the earth itself transgressed? If Adam will be made new in the same way that the earth will be, then what does the description of the earth that comes next in Rev. teach us about Adam? What does the "no more sea" in this vision imply about the work during the creation of separating the water and the dry land?

Another thought: throughout Genesis, cities are consistently and emphatically seen as negative. Is that viewpoint redeemed in this pericope?

(How) does the language about the bride adorned for her husband relate to the Adam/Eve story as found in Genesis?

"Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them." This, of course, is a perfect inversion of the Fall, where Adam and Eve could no longer be in God's presence. I find it curious at this point that a "new creation" is required in order for them (i.e., God and Adam/Eve) to be re-united. Why couldn't they (symbolically) dwell together in the old creation?

Reply

2.



Kevin Barney May 24, 2009 at 6:22 PM

I've been away at the annual conference of the Mormon History Association and just got back today.

When I read over this passage and Eric's post, I had a perhaps unusual thought. Is it possible that the tabernacle of v. 3 (skEnE) is the body of God, "tabernacle of God" being an epexegetic genitive?

The reason I ask is that I immediately thought of the passage Eric crossreferences, John 1:13, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt [verbal cognate to skEnE] with us." There the Word takes on flesh as though the flesh were a tent covering his spirit; the implicit tent of the passage is referring to his physical body.

Also, throughout our passage there is an idea that there doesn't need to be a temple, because God will already be dwelling among the people. We see this at the end of v. 3 ("God *himself* shall be with them"). The concept is made really explicit in v. 22:

And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

So am I reaching here, or is this a possibility?

Reply

3.



Eric D. Huntsman May 24, 2009 at 7:15 PM

I would probably call it an objective genitive, "the covering/tenting of God" rather than an epexegetic (tent = God; see Wallace, 95-96; no BDF equivalent). Grammatical definitions notwithstanding, I think Kevin's point is right on. We tend to think of temples as houses of God (subjective or possessive genitive), but they stand for some greater existential possibility, that God dwells among his people. In addition to the John 1:13 echo, I thought about (but failed to put in the exegesis) the clear resonance with Matt 1:23 = Isa 7:14 LXX, Immanuel = God with us.

Reply

4.



Adam S. Miller June 4, 2009 at 7:23 AM

Excellent post, Eric.

I also appreciated the initial post giving us a rundown of the various interpretive approaches. Of the approaches mentioned, I think that you're likely right to favor the progressive dispensationalist approach.

Julie has raised a host of questions about the intertextual connections between these verses and Genesis 1-3 that, I think, will be very promising to pursue - though I'll leave those, for now, to Julie :)

And I think that Kevin and Eric have very helpfully emphasized the need to juxtapose John's account of the incarnation with this account of God "dwelling" among us in his "tent/tabernacle."

I'll try, in short order, to offer some additional comments of my own in a separate post.

Reply

Revelations 21: 5-9

5And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. 6And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. 7He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. 8But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. 9And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

Summary and Approach

This segment stirs additional symbols and allusions into the initial visionary experience of 1-5, eventually coming back around to the New Jerusalem-as-bride, thereby introducing the expansive, highly detailed and densely symbolic description of the bride/city developed later in the vision. With that subsequent orientation in mind, the remarks below focus primarily on themes, symbols and (selected) possible allusions developed in the narrative's recursive and expanding gyre.

Although I focus on the LDS edition of the KJV, I am also looking at the New Oxford Annotated Bible (NRSV), and at Tyndale's 1520 translation of the New Testament (a means of keeping this blog related to my other projects).

Verse 5

In addition to what Eric has already said about this line, note that the durable symbol of authority, the throne, is also used as a special modifier for the simple pronoun "he" used to refer to God. Given that it is difficult in the context of Jewish tradition to hear "throne" without thinking of David's throne, and Solomon's seat of judgment, the making of "all things new" is framed in the memory of an ideal of protection, commitment, wise judgment, and the exercise of justice -- actions that create communities of mutual trust (true and faithful). In contrast to Roman imperial authority, which like Babylon's gets expressed through the literal and spiritual destruction of Jerusalem, Divine sovereignty is exercised through an act of creation that acknowledges the righteous traditions and endeavors of humanity (hence the proper echoes around the symbol of the throne) while recognizing serious limitations and the need of Divine rescue.

Moreover, the Creator's oral exclamation/direction ("behold" or "look" or "see") gives way to the instruction to "Write," with the implication that the words are not meant primarily for historical accounting nor spiritual recollection, but as another mode for making "all things new." William Tyndale's Pathway into the Holy Scripture asserts that revelatory words in fact perform actions: they wound, heal, liberate, command, promise, inspire.

Comment: With regard to the throne imagery, and given my bias toward theologies that orient us toward action, I am immediately put in mind of the rebuke given to Jehoiakim in Jeremiah 22. Here, Jehoiakim is seen as being misguided in his attempts to recover the glory of Solomon through elaborate building projects supported by means of uncompensated labor and restrictions on freedom (see notes in the NRSV). This is not a righteously conceived nor divinely approved city.

Rather, Jehoiakim is enjoined to emulate his father Josiah, whose throne was based on a true and faithful form of righteous sovereignty: "Are you a king / because you compete in cedar? / did not your father eat and drink / and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. / He judged the cause of the poor / and needy; / then it was well. Is not this to know me? / says the LORD" (15-16). I quote from the NRSV, here, because it is much more plainly spoken on the issue of what constitutes a true throne at the heart of a righteous city (England's King James asserted an ideology of absolute monarchy, claiming power over subjects rather than power on behalf of citizens, and such themes certainly had to be handled carefully by the KJV scholars).

Verse 6

The pronouncement, "It is done," might be read as meant to invoke a double image:

(1) the conclusion of new-making, the results of which we are about to see in glorious detail, and

(2) Jesus's death, concluding a ministry based on what one commentator describes as "the astonishing promise offered to the riffraff" (Eagleton, Reason, Faith, and Revolution, 56).

The prospect of visionary doubling seems likely given that, as the verse then goes on, the Lord is declared to be "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." And as mentioned in a previous post, the latter image forms a nice bracket to the vision of the throne and the command to write.

Thirst, the fountain and the water of life, and the freely given gift form the symbolic transition from the throne in verse 5 to the prospect of inheritance in verse 7. The fountain, or spring, deserves much more attention than I will give it here. However, especially striking is the tonal nuance it gives to what might otherwise seem a fairly stentorian proclamation of the Divine nature as all-in-all: here, "the beginning and end" is to "give the water of life freely." Again, the vision coaxes us to see true might in God's terms. God's might, as it turns out, is the act of giving freely that which gives life, especially an abundance of life. In fact, the bejeweled splendor and perfection of measurement we are about to see is an elaborate extension of Jesus's clarification of Divine purpose: "I am come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

Comment: I do think that "Alpha and Omega" is a fairly practical means of linking the kinds of action performed by inspired words, and a more general them of the New Jerusalem as the city of living abundance (as opposed to mere soul-deadening acquisition). In this regard, I am especially fond of Isaiah's poetic dramatization of the proper plenitude that sustains, nurtures, and results in a robust growth, strength and vigorous pleasure – a feast of righteousness that begins with thirst, leads to the fountain of life, and progresses to a table set for all "the peoples": "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come yet to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness . . . and your soul shall live" (55: 1-3).

Think also of the invitation to participate in Wisdom's banquet in Proverbs 9:5. These feasts and fountains suggest a delightful paradox: dependence on God is really the freedom of unrestrained growth.

Verses 7 & 8

Here, a dramatic juxtaposition forms a narrative hinge by which the door to a more expansive view of the New

Jerusalem will swing open. The Divine throne dramatized earlier in the vision is now seen in relation to inheritance, and God insists, "He that overcometh . . . shall be my son." If there are any doubts as to what is to be overcome, the subsequent list in verse 8 gives a few specific examples, all of which contrast starkly with the theme of abundance – these latter are all forms of limiting, distorting, or outright ending life's potential, and constitute a "second death." This death, in turn, is metaphorically constituted as a "lake which burneth with fire and brimstone," an image set off against the freely-flowing water of the fountain of life.

Comment: The juxtaposition of the fountain "of the water of life" to the "lake which burneth" implies that there are moral implications and consequences for how and why we thirst. Given that thirst sometimes refers to spiritual seeking and sometimes to those who stand in material need, and that frequently scripture suggests that they are satisfied in each other, it begins to look like the New Jerusalem is to be conceived of less as a complete ideal toward which one moves, and more as being fully present in any material case where life is made more abundant. In this sense, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand -- or, in my reading, to hand. Actually, I'm still working out what looks like an interesting tension between future-directed doing, and now-focused creating. More on this later.

Verse 9

Not surprisingly, the vision now moves from the prospect of inheritance back to "the bride, the Lamb's wife." In verses 10 and 11, that bride will be revealed as the "holy Jerusalem," and again we are invited to bring two images together into one. The bride's capacity for regeneration is framed in terms of a holy beauty, and the city's splendor is likewise developed in terms of incandescence. In short, the graphic but relatively simple metaphors of the living fountain and the burning lake will give way to a more spectacular, more complex series of symbols. To say the least, this is the point in the vision where the theme of abundance will become mind-boggling in its splendor, requiring the imagination to stretch to accommodate the full breadth and depth of the grandeur. Yet it is also the point in the narrative where we sense a fine equipoise between abundance and thirsting, intimacy and inclusiveness.

Comment: The desire to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (1 Chr. 16:29, Ps. 29:2, 96:9) is perhaps a good starting place for thinking about the elaborate images that follow the reintroduction of the Bride. The Bride also reminds us of what Aquinas movingly suggests: that charity presupposes rather than excludes the erotic.

Questions

1. Julie has suggested that we explore the relationship between the story of creation in Genesis and the account of created newness developed in Revelation. What, specifically, changes in our understanding of the thematic development in this passage (God's throne, writing, Divine doing as beginning and end, living water freely given, inheritance vs. second death, the Bride), if we consider any of the symbols or metaphors of Eden in relation to those of this vision? What contradictions or paradoxes arise, and what possibilities for theological insight?
2. What are the further theological possibilities in this passage when we account for physicality, as Kevin suggests, especially in relation to themes of inheritance, living water, beauty, and holiness?
3. What capacities are implied by the "son" who inherits from God by "overcoming" or "conquering"?

Posted by [Brandie Siegfried](#) at 11:36 AM

8 comments:



1.

Julie M. Smith May 31, 2009 at 2:31 PM

Thanks for this post.

"These feasts and fountains suggest a delightful paradox: dependence on God is really the freedom of unrestrained growth."

I love this.

"In this sense, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand -- or, in my reading, to hand."

Can you say a little more about this?

"Not surprisingly, the vision now moves from the prospect of inheritance back to "the bride, the Lamb's wife." "

Why don't you find this surprising? If I didn't hang on to my hat, I could get imagery whiplash in this chapter!

Some random thoughts:

--V5 seems to be borrowing from Isaiah 65:17. To me, this complicates the discussion of "writing" and "making new" in interesting ways. Also, after Isaiah has the line about making things new, there is this line: "and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." I can't find that sentiment in Revelation; although perhaps I've missed it. I wonder if this is significant.

--Another thought on v6's "It is done." The verb is plural, giving us "They are done." To what might the "they" refer? The words in v5? Or something else?

--V7: there is a strong parallel between "I will be his God and he shall be my son" and v3's "God himself shall be with them," except that v7 is more personalized. (That is, an individual relationship instead of a corporate one.) I wonder if this communal to personal movement is reflected in other ways in this text.

Reply

2.



Kevin Barney June 1, 2009 at 10:29 AM

Julie, how are you getting a plural "they are done" out of gegonen in v. 6? That looks singular to me.

The Alpha and Omega thing always makes me think of the Hebrew word for "truth, faithfulness, firmness," which is 'emeth. That word begins with the first letter of the alphabet, aleph, followed by a letter in the middle of the alphabet, mem, and concluded by the last letter of the alphabet, tau. So visually that word represents the beginning, the end, and all that is in between, or knowledge of things as they were, as they are and as they are to come.

The "I will be his God, and he shall be my son" suggests a theosis concept to me.

Reply

3.



Brandie Siegfried June 1, 2009 at 1:55 PM

Thanks for your comments, Julie and Kevin.

Responding to Julie's comments: the "to hand" I'm thinking of is a play on our English way of framing doing in relation to time and space. "At hand" tends to suggest that one is about to

grasp something that is near; “in hand” suggests that one already has it in grasp, and “to hand” (though sometimes used as a synonym for “at hand”) refers to the moment of coming-into, with implications of labor and servitude. So what I’m toying with here is the idea that the Kingdom of Heaven is both “at hand” (can be grasped soon) and “to hand” (is emerging as our labors serve God).

Now you’ve got me thinking, though, about other related possibilities regarding the theological implications of the English translation, especially the KJV. The 17th century poet George Herbert has a great poem in which he plays on the meaning of “hand” as used in a card game (what one has been dealt, and the chances one is willing to take in relation to desire – or in our case, “thirst”) and “hand” as in the nearness of God’s kingdom. Given the significance of writing in this passage, another English use of “hand” can be meaningful: one’s hand referring to the peculiar identifying characteristics of one’s own writing, especially writing as attestation (as in signing a will or other legal device for inheritance). Hands also represent capacity, agency, will. I’m still thinking in 16th and 17th century terms, in which “hand” can also mean a way, or tendency, or direction (as in “a mending hand”). If I push the inheritance metaphor, a use of “hand” still current when the KJV was being polished (but now archaic) is economic and refers to the outcome of bartering, the final cost (“best hand” vs. “better hand” vs. “dear hand”).

This might all suggest something like this: to say that God’s kingdom is “at hand” and “to hand” is to say that

(1) certain kinds of labor and servitude instantiate the “coming-into” (reality? material expression? full comprehension?) of God’s kingdom. In this sense, the Kingdom is not fully future nor is it fully present;

(2) this “coming-into” requires attestation, but attestation in distinctively identifiable terms – what identifies the Kingdom are the distinctive or peculiar characteristics of the signatories. God’s peculiar signature ratifies the final cost (the “dear hand” of Jesus’s ministry and sacrifice) of the inheritance for his children, yet the distinctive attestation of those very children is also required – in terms of their distinctive capacities – before the inheritance to be received;

(3) these distinctive capacities must in turn create a way, direction, or tendency that allows agency, desire, and will to clasp others the way God wants them to be grasped/embraced (another archaic use of “hand” = arm). This would probably be a good place to wrestle with Levinas and Ricoeur (which I won’t do just now, but it occurs to me that the “at hand” modifier for the Kingdom of Heaven might be usefully amplified by some of Ricoeur’s ideas on recognition).

Also, Julie, I do think you caught me taking for granted the “obvious” movement from inheritance imagery back to the bride imagery. To me, this seemed a natural shift given that the Bride in some sense will give birth to the children who inherit. Or more generally, she makes inheritance possible. Certainly there are interesting symbolic possibilities involved with understanding “writing” as regenerative, and perhaps even as another avatar of the Bride (a nice parallel to the function of “Word” at the beginning of Revelation).

In this regard, though, I’d like you to say more about how Isaiah 65:17 as complicates Revelation’s use of “writing” and “making new” in what you see as especially interesting ways.

Kevin, I like your comment on the word ‘emeth. I’d like to think about this in terms of the limitations of language. I’ll post more later in response.

Reply



Julie M. Smith June 1, 2009 at 6:16 PM

Kevin, NA26 and the two online texts I use have gegonan, not gegonen. Is there a textual variant there?

Reply

5.



Kevin Barney June 3, 2009 at 10:10 AM

Aha! There is indeed a textual variant in v. 6. I'm at work, but just from poking around on the internet there appear to be three variants:

1. gegonan reflects the Alexandrian text (Tischendorf; Westcott-Hort).
2. gegona reflects the Byzantine majority text.
3. gegonen reflects the Textus Receptus (both Stephens 1550 and Scrivener 1894).

I was at work and looking at the Blue Letter Bible, which reflects the TR underlying the KJV. The singular is also reflected in the Vulgate's factum est.

Assuming that we follow the Alexandrian reading, then you're right, instead of "it is done" it would be plural and something like "they have come to pass."

I wonder whether the "they" could be the "faithful words" just spoken of?

Reply

6.



Adam S. Miller June 4, 2009 at 7:43 AM

Brandie says:

"These feasts and fountains suggest a delightful paradox: dependence on God is really the freedom of unrestrained growth."

I agree with Julie that this is a fantastic formulation.

Further, I'm very interested in how you've identified thirst/desire and its appropriate and inappropriate means of gratification as being one of the central problematics that the heavenly city is meant to address. The question of novelty/newness is, I think, at the heart of desire and whatever salvific transformations such desires may undergo.

Also, for whatever its worth, I personally prefer the plural "they have come to pass" to the singular "it is done" because the former seems to leave more room for something additional to come next. Rather sounding like "it (everything!) is done," it sounds like "these things here are taken care of."

Again, though, I'll try to offer some comments of my own on these verses in an additional post.

[Reply](#)

7.



Julie M. Smith June 6, 2009 at 9:43 AM

Brandie writes: "In this regard, though, I'd like you to say more about how Isaiah 65:17 as complicates Revelation's use of "writing" and "making new" in what you see as especially interesting ways."

I find irony in that "all things" have been made new, but we are going to express that fact via language that is very old (from Isaiah, who recorded the promise that all things would be made new) and write it down, which means that it will also age, and yet it represents newness. So all things might have been made new, but old things (Isaiah's writings) still have use and value.

[Reply](#)

8.



Adam S. Miller June 12, 2009 at 7:41 AM

21:9 - "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.'"

Why is a "plague" angel introducing John to the wife of the Lamb? Aren't there any non-plague angels available for this more genteel task of making introductions? Does the angel have the seven bowls of plagues *in hand* while the introductions are being made? What a curious image.

[Reply](#)

Revelation 21:10-17

10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, 11 Having the glory of God: and her light [was] like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; 12 And had a wall great and high, [and] had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are [the names] of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: 13 On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. 14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. 15 And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. 16 And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. 17

And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred [and] forty [and] four cubits, [according to] the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.

This section offers the first description of the holy Jerusalem, full of resplendent glory.

Vs.10 “carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain” – Although Moses, in the Pearl of Great Price, mentions being “caught up into an exceedingly high mountain” (Moses 1:1), the only other prophet who mentions being carried away in the spirit “into an exceedingly high mountain” (1 Ne 10:1) in order to see a vision is Nephi, who later ties his vision to that of John (see comment below about other connections between Nephi’s vision and Revelation). Nephi uses this imagery of motion while “in the Spirit” six times in the space of six chapters while describing his vision, three times referring to himself, once referring to the Apostles of the Lamb, and twice referring to Mary. In each instance, physical movement is described, with the individual being “caught away” or “carried away.” This type of visionary movement is not used again throughout the rest of the Book of Mormon, although a later Nephi is literally “conveyed away” (He 10:16) from one group of people “in the Spirit” (Hel 10:17) in order to preach to another. Paul mentions being “caught up” into a vision of paradise, and implies movement when he mentions that he isn’t aware whether he was caught up “in the body” or “out of the body.” Joseph Smith’s vision of heavenly realms in D&C 76 combines the two themes, mentioning an uncertainty about the corporeal nature of the experience, and mentioning numerous times that he and Sidney Rigdon are “in the spirit.” Elsewhere in scripture, such as in Rev 4:2, being “in the spirit” seems to imply not that the spirit has carried the prophet to another location in order to see the vision, but that the prophet is in the correct frame of mind and endowed with the power of God in order to perceive the vision.

This leads back to Eric’s earlier statement: “Saints in every age labor to build a holy community... In these instances a Spiritual approach is appropriate, because a spiritual community is trying to realize heaven on earth in this fallen sphere. Further, an LDS literal interpretation is also a symbolic one, inasmuch as the celestialized earth indeed becomes ‘heaven’ for its inhabitants.” While the author of Revelation had to be carried to another location in order to be in the correct location to see the holy city descend, it is also important in interpreting the vision to understand that disciples of Christ must be “in the spirit” to recognize the qualities of and to help bring to pass the holy city, as builders of Zion. For this prophetic goal, see Heb 11:10, Abraham: “For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

Vs. 11-17 -- Interestingly, the author of Revelation describes being carried away in the Spirit one other time in Revelation: when he had the vision of the mother of harlots, representing the worldly city Babylon. In this case, rather than being carried to a high mountain, he was carried away into the wilderness. While the abode of the mother of harlots in the wilderness might remind the reader of

the curse placed on Adam and Eve: “Cursed is the ground for thy sake... thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee” (Gen 3:17-18), the high mountain would serve as a reminder of the paradisiacal Garden of Eden, which served as high ground for the rivers which descended from it to water the earth (Gen 2:10-14). While the wilderness creates an image of the desolation and curse of the world, the mountain signals to the reader an entry into sacred space, where heaven can touch earth and where the chaos of a fallen world can be overcome as order is created by divine interaction. Accordingly, the city of God is a place of beauty and order in Revelation, where tears are wiped away and where the chaos of death, sorrow, crying, and pain are done away with (21:4). I will refrain from commenting on jasper, since the stones of the city will likely be discussed further in a subsequent section of this blog. The gates, wall, and foundation of the city have been built to exact, symbolically significant measurements and the city is perfectly symmetrical (21:13-17).

The constant repetition of various forms of the number 12, with the overt reference to the twelve apostles and to the twelve tribes of Israel, whose names are written on the gates and on the foundations of the wall, may indicate that God remembers his promises and covenants with the ancient tribes of Israel, whose destiny is now tied up with Christ’s meridian-day and (and latter-day) Church. Both modes of leadership in God’s kingdom are tied together in the heavenly city: patriarchal leadership and apostolic leadership, and both are necessary. The number 12 could signify the importance of priesthood power and the importance of the Abrahamic covenant and God’s promise to gather and redeem the twelve tribes of Israel in the last days. Twelve squared in vs. 17 would then symbolize a fullness of priesthood power and a fullness of the redemption of the twelve tribes. The size and shape of the city (vs. 16-17) should also be mentioned. The length, breadth, and height (!) of the holy city are each 12,000 *stadion*, or almost 1,400 miles! (1 *stadion* = about 200 yards.) The city is beyond the scope of human effort and must be measured by an angel, much like the wall of the temple in Ezekiel 40. This is in contrast to Revelation 11, in which John was asked to measure the temple while the earthly city of Jerusalem was still under worldly influence. The temple still maintained order in the midst of chaos in Rev 11, and could be measured. However, the immense walls of the holy city in Rev 21 could not be measured by a human being. They were the work of God. The shape of the city as a perfect cube could also symbolize the joining of earth and heaven. The 4-sided dimensions of the square symbolizes the four “corners” of the earth, but the additional third dimension of height symbolizing a heavenly perfection that existed within the city.

In the holy city, the foundations will prevent the wall from falling, the extremely high walls will protect the inhabitants and keep evil and disorder out, and the gates will allow all of the true “children of Israel” to enter. The presence of angels at each of the gates of the city reminds of the cherubim on the veil of the Tabernacle which guarded the entrance to the Holy of Holies, even more so since the dimensions of the city are a perfect square, reminiscent of the shape of the Holy of Holies. The image of the cherubim upon the veil in turn reminds of the cherubim who were

placed at the entrance of Eden to guard the way back to the tree of life. Further imagery connecting the holy Jerusalem with the garden of Eden will come in Rev 22. All of this stands in contrast to Babylon, in which there is not mention of a foundation, wall, or gates. It is full of chaos, “abominations,” (17:5) and “the blood of the saints,” (17:6). It is the “habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird” (18:2). Later in chapter 21, the contrast between the order of the holy Jerusalem and the chaos of Babylon is made clear: “And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abominations or maketh a lie” (21:27). Through symbolic imagery, Revelation teaches of the results of staying under the influence of the world and of Babylon, and the serenity, peace, and order that are available when one comes to sacred space, is “in the spirit,” and can be a part of the holy city of God. The orderly measuring of the holy city might also remind the Latter-day Saint reader of the model of holy cities centered on temples, presented by Joseph Smith and continued by Brigham Young. In these cities the streets of the community spread out in orderly fashion from the temple, with wide roads, spacious lots, and an orderly distribution of homes, much like Moses’ camp of Israel was centered on the temple in an orderly fashion, with three tribes on each side. Saints and disciples seek to create order from chaos, and promote life where there was previously wilderness.

The earthly city, Babylon: Eric earlier mentioned the scriptural precedence for a bride being connected with a city, and Julie questioned whether the negative image of cities in Genesis is redeemed with the emergence of the holy city. What is the connection between the bride and the city? I’ll present here one possible answer to that question and would welcome other thoughts. Because cities are only created when men and women decide to live in close proximity to each other, cooperating to achieve common purposes, the city becomes an excellent symbol for community, or unity. The instance of the tower of Babylon provides an archetype for the dangers of a city of mankind bent on selfish, prideful designs. Men have great power when they use their agency and desires to join together and accomplish their designs. At the tower of Babel, the combination that was created sought to thwart God’s designs. The Lord said of their work, “This they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. (Gen 11:6)” Similar warnings against the power of evil combinations of men to overthrow the work of God are found in abundance in the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price. The great city Babylon became the symbol par excellence of a society of mankind full of pride and full of the love of material things, which sought to thwart the purposes of God to fulfill its own lustful desires.

The heavenly city, Jerusalem: The city of Enoch works as the opposing symbol to the tower of Babel, but is not mentioned in Genesis. We instead have to find a description of it in the JST and in the Pearl of Great Price. While those at the tower of Babel desired to make a name for themselves (Gen 11:4), the inhabitants of Zion desired to dwell in righteousness (Moses 7:18), and received their name from God. The author of Revelation sets up the scene beautifully. Babylon is described at

length in Rev 17, and the reader is shown that, while powerful, the combinations of men will not overthrow the works of God in the end, but will be overcome by the disorder and chaos that they sought to embrace. Just as the evil attempts of mankind concluded in even greater disorder and lack of unity at the tower of Babel because of God's power to confuse the languages, so will Babylon ultimately be destroyed because of God's sovereignty. Instead of Babylon, when heaven connects with earth, heavenly cities dwelt in by humankind can be created and mankind can overcome the chaos of a fallen world to live in peaceful and righteous community. The key to the redemption of the city is found in the sovereignty of God and mankind's acceptance of heavenly principles. The importance of the model of the righteous, heavenly city is emphasized in LDS scripture. JST Gen 9:21-22 repeats a theme that has been mentioned earlier in this blog: The heavenly city comes when God sends it, but also when mankind is prepared to create it. The rainbow was set as a sign that the heavenly city would be sent again by God as soon as there was a people prepared to follow God's commandments. "21b. When men should keep all my commandments, Zion should again come on the earth, the city of Enoch which I have caught up unto myself. 22. And this is mine everlasting covenant, that when they posterity shall embrace the truth, and look upward, then shall Zion look downward..." The connection between covenant and holy cities is inferred by this statement.

The symbol of the woman: The woman, as a symbol of life and creation through procreative powers, is also a powerful symbol of unity. When procreative powers are abused in a mocking irony of the unity that should only exist within the marital covenant, the woman is described as the harlot, or the mother of all harlots. But when the woman becomes a holy bride, prepared for the bridegroom, then the earth can be prepared for the unity that will exist when God rules over his people and they are unified through sacred covenants. In short, both the woman and the city are used as symbols of unity, community, power, beauty, and life. When the power of community or the power of life are used for lustful, selfish purposes, the symbols become an evil mockery of that which is good, and are destined for failure and destruction. When they are used to connect to and become one with God, they are symbols of joy and beauty. I believe Rev 12:17 contains a central statement of the book which emphasizes the importance of the symbol of the woman. It describes Satan's war against the life, unity, and community that the people of God seek to create, symbolized by the woman: "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."

Side comment: A few other similarities between Nephi's vision and that of the author of Revelation include (among many others, I'm sure): 1) John contrasts the mother of harlots (17:5), representing the city of Babylon, with the bride of the Lamb, the holy Jerusalem (21:9-10). Nephi contrasts the glorious virgin, in the city of Nazareth (1 Ne 11:13) with the "mother of all harlots," "the great and abominable church... whose founder is the devil" (1 Ne 14:17) and who will have God's wrath

poured out upon her, as also occurs in Revelation. 2) The author of Revelation uses the title Lamb for Christ 26 times. The only other time in the New Testament that this title is used is in the Gospel of John, where it is used twice. Nephi uses the title “Lamb” for Christ 56 times during his vision. (It is used once before Nephi’s vision when Lehi was describing his own vision.) The title is not used elsewhere besides in Nephi’s writings (he also uses it in his concluding address, 2 Ne 31-33) until Alma the younger (three times), Mormon (once) and Moroni (five times). Interestingly, two of the times Moroni uses the title (so, two out of the nine times it is used by someone other than Nephi), are in his description of Ether’s vision of the New Jerusalem. 3) The commands given to the author of Revelation to “look/ behold,” and to “write” (mentioned earlier by Brandie), are prevalent in Nephi’s vision as well, although the command to write is only implied in 1 Ne 14. Nephi is commanded to “Look!” (with a heavy, urgent emphasis on action) thirteen different times in his short vision. This command is not used anywhere else in the Book of Mormon in the same way.

Posted by [Shon Hopkin](#) at [9:28 AM](#)
Labels: [Revelation](#)

4 comments:

1.



Julie M. Smith [June 6, 2009 at 10:21 AM](#)

Shon, thanks for this post. I found your comments about the physical movement of the prophet interesting. I think it is complicated here by the fact that not only does John move, but the city moves, too. Is the suggestion made that what previous prophets had to be physically moved to experience will one day come to us?

"I will refrain from commenting on jasper, since the stones of the city will likely be discussed further in a subsequent section of this blog."

Thank you for not stealing my thunder. :)

I'm fascinated by your side comments. Any thoughts as to why the "lamb" image would be particularly appropriate here? I am thinking that we might follow the trail from the heavenly city as a temple (as you note, it shares dimensions with the holy of holies) to the idea of Jesus as the sacrificed lamb in order to explain that title here. But is there more?

Random thoughts:

--The link between the city and the bride is so strong that in v9, he is told that he will be shown the bride, but in v10, he is shown the city!

--On v11: Note that the adornments of the bride and the harlot (see 17:4) are rather similar. I think one point of the revelation is to show the harlot as an imposter, an imitator, a fraud.

Reply

2.



Adam S. Miller June 8, 2009 at 6:44 PM

Shon,

This is an excellent post - it's truly omnibus in character!

I especially appreciated your discussion of the symbolic importance of the size and scope the "cubed" heavenly city in these verses.

Also, a little later in the post you say:

"What is the connection between the bride and the city? I'll present here one possible answer to that question and would welcome other thoughts. Because cities are only created when men and women decide to live in close proximity to each other, cooperating to achieve common purposes, the city becomes an excellent symbol for community, or unity. "

I think that this is right on the money. And we might even go a step beyond saying that the city is a *symbol* for community and unity to simply saying that the living, thriving city *is* this unity - the city being the phenomenon that "emerges" out of the "local" interactions of individual men and women in a way that is dependent on, but not reducible to, those interactions.

My best,
Adam

Reply

3.



Adam S. Miller June 12, 2009 at 8:20 AM

Some additional (better late than never) comments of my own on these verses.

21:11, "It [the holy city] has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as a crystal."

The image here is that of a city full of glory ("doxan": most literally, something like "appearance"), radiance, and clarity. The city is characterized by the clarity of its radiant manifestation, by a kind of guileless transparency in its relation to itself, by an overflowing of transparency that irrepressibly "radiates" outward.

Note, too, that the initial talk of jewels is expressly introduced as a simile for clarity: "the glory of God and a radiance *like* a very rare jewel, *like* jasper. Perhaps we can take this is a general key for working with jewels as symbols? Jewel = clarity/radiance?"

21:12, ". . . and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites"

I'm interested in the notion of inscription and, in general, with the problematic that is writing. Perhaps there is a connection between this work of inscription and the transparent glory radiated by the city. Having been inscribed with a name, the thing shines forth as what it is? Just speculating here.

21:15, "The one speaking with me had a golden measuring rod . . ."

Shon makes an excellent point here about *this* city being measurable only by an angel:

"The city is beyond the scope of human effort and must be measured by an angel, much like the wall of the temple in Ezekiel 40. This is in contrast to Revelation 11, in which John was asked to measure the temple while the earthly city of Jerusalem was still under worldly influence. The temple still maintained order in the midst of chaos in Rev 11, and could be measured. However, the immense walls of the holy city in Rev 21 could not be measured by a human being. They were the work of God."

The clarity and regularity of the measurements strike me as resonant with the city's generally radiant clarity.

21:16, ". . . and he measured the city with his rod . . . its length and width and height are equal"

What an amazing image - a vertical city! Especially since this verticality does not appear to refer to the height of the walls which are measured in verse 17 as only approximately 75 yards high as opposed to the city's own height of 1500 miles! The walls, here, would simply be dwarfed by the city itself. The walls would look, by way of contrast, like a merely decorative flourish.

I like this though – the radiant glory of the holy city so out-measures the height of the walls that the walls themselves are rendered insignificant.

This reminds me as well of something Shon said earlier in his post:

"In the holy city, the foundations will prevent the wall from falling, the extremely high walls will protect the inhabitants and keep evil and disorder out, and the gates will allow all of the true "children of Israel" to enter."

I think that this is right, but I wonder about the need to "keep evil and disorder out" if the sea has itself already been "drained" before the city descends? If the sea/chaos has already been drained, then perhaps the walls (though very functional at 75 yards high!) are properly insignificant and largely decorative in relation to the city's own magnificence.

[Reply](#)

4.



[Shon Hopkin](#) **June 17, 2009 at 6:10 PM**

I appreciate these insightful comments.

Julie: I completely agree with your statement that one of the purposes for the emphasis on the "lamb" is the connection that would be made by Jewish and Christian readers with Temple imagery. I think the symbol gains in strength when the lamb is contrasted with the beast, the dragon, and other symbols of evil power throughout Revelation. While the beast and the dragon seek power and control for themselves, the lamb becomes a willing, pure sacrifice to bring power and glory to the pure followers of Christ, so that tears can be wiped away from their eyes. Thanks, Julie, for this connection.

Adam: I'm interested in your comments on the inscribed names, and think it points to additional possibilities for exploration. The inscription/writing of the names on the gates brings to mind the permanence when the law was engraved in stone by the finger of God at Sinai. I'm also reminded of Alma 5:19 and the important LDS concept of having God's image "engraven" upon our countenances. What is the symbolic importance of names and the law being inscribed/engraved upon stone? Is there a connection between the permanence of these inscribed names and the inscription of the law? Is there a connection between these two

inscriptions and the engraving of Christ's image upon the countenance of true followers of Christ (presumably as a witness/evidence of their true discipleship)? One possible connection could be found in Paul's statement in 2 Cor. 3:2-3 -- "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshy tables of the heart." Lots of fun possibilities to be explored here, I think.

Adam: I appreciate you drawing attention to the height of the city as opposed to the height of the gates. Truly, although the high gates remain an important symbol in this pericope, they are dwarfed by the all-encompassing size of the holy city. So... a wall around the holy city, fine and good. But as you indicated, let's not get so caught up on the importance of the wall that we miss the true beauty of the city/bride. I appreciate you calling the walls "decorative." If the city is the bride, I wonder if it would be at all fair to compare the wall to the bride's adornments in 19:8 -- "And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." Just a thought...

Reply

Omnibus Make-Up Comments - 21:1-9

Verse 1

'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.'

In general, I am especially interested in the problem of what it means for something to be "new." The first clue to what the newness (*kainon/kainen*) amounts to in these verses comes in the second clause.

Why are the heaven and earth new? Because: (1) the first heaven and the first earth have passed away, and (2) the sea is no more.

Here, novelty arises in connection with *the passing away* of what came first. Novelty is a question of succession: a movement from the first thing to the next thing. But this is not succession by way of addition (as when 2 succeeds 1 and then incorporates 1 into itself). Rather, this succession is what follows in light of the first thing "having passed away." The novelty arises as the result of a dissolution (at least in part) rather than a subsumption of its precedent.

Further, it's useful to describe this passing away as a "passing away *in part*" because some strong continuity is also implied: though they are "new," we are still talking about things that are recognizably heaven and recognizably earth.

Also, we learn something about the *way* in which the heaven and earth are new: they are new in that the sea (as Eric noted: “the sea = the liquid formlessness of chaos”) is no more. This, then, is a kind of novelty initiated by cessation or subtraction:

(heaven/earth) – (the sea) = (new heaven/earth)

We might, then, venture the following reading as an opening possibility: (1) the newness of the heaven and earth follows from the “passing away” of the first heaven and earth, and (2) the first heaven and earth pass away when liquid chaos has been subtracted from them.

Novelty as succession by way of subtraction.

It’s also worth noting in this verse that *both* the heaven and the earth are new – not just the earth. The new Jerusalem is going to come out of heaven, but this heaven is itself described as having been made new.

We don’t, then, have an image of straightforward imposition: it is not as if the heavens were perfect, the earth was corrupt, and then the earth is made new by the heavens imposing their transcendent perfection on the earth’s immanent corruption.

Rather, *both* heaven and earth are made new via a subtraction of chaos and *then* a novel link is forged between the two by the descent of the new Jerusalem from heaven.

Verse 2

'And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.'

If we understand the “holy city” to be the model of a perfected sociality, then it is striking that this sociality is depicted as a “coming down” from heaven. Perhaps we could say: the model for a perfected sociality is the universality of *kenosis* (or self-emptying condescension) not simply as a “one-time” necessity but as a perpetual/permanent movement of self-divestment.

Insofar as heaven is identified as the origin of this sociality, then we might also view this as the defining feature of heaven: heaven = a perfected sociality.

Also, the city comes down “from God” – which is to say that it is a gift with an assignable giver.

Verse 3

'And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See the tabernacle of God is among humans. He will tabernacle with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them [as] their God."

Are we meant to identify the tabernacle with the city itself? Or as part of the city? We are told later (v22) that the city will have no temple in it because God himself will be its temple.

Key prepositions: God is *among* mortals and he tabernacles *with* them.

These prepositions characterize the kind of sociality that will prevail in the new city: in this holy city (i.e., in this city that is itself set apart or separated out), God will not be set apart or separated out from his people. He will be among and with us.

Also, note the co-belonging that characterizes this possessive sociality: we will be *his*, but he will also be *ours*. This co-belonging is appropriate to the structure of a symmetrical kenosis.

Verse 4

'He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. Mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'

Interesting to note that, again, the novelty of the city is described by way of subtraction. The "first things" will have passed away because they will have subtracted from them tears, death, mourning, crying, and pain.

We should, though, as Mormons, be cautious about how we characterize the end of such suffering. It may be better to speak of their transfiguration rather than their cessation. As Mormons, we believe that even God, a resurrected and glorified personage, continues to weep for the suffering of his children (cf. Moses 7:28).

This is consonant as well with the character of the city as symmetrically kenotic: what brings an end to tears is not necessarily that we each stop crying but that we each wipe each other's tears away. In this sense (and for a number of additional reasons), I'd prefer to speak of a transfiguration of suffering rather than its cessation. In this new city, something gets subtracted from death and suffering (perhaps we could say: its "sting"?) that doesn't simply eliminate it (as in Satan's plan) but transfigures it.

Verse 5

'And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."'

First, as others have noted, I like that the NRSV renders the first declaration as an ongoing present tense action: "I *am making* all things new."

Also, it's worth pointing out that the old things are not here described as being *replaced* by new things; rather, the old things are described as being *made into* new things. Some operation (generally described thus far as a kind of glorifying subtraction) is re-fashioning them into something new. And, further, the claim is not that *some* of the old things are being made new, but that *all* of the old things are being made new!

Finally, as Julie noted, we might ascribe some significance to the contiguity of the declaration that all things are being made new and the commandment to write. Writing, as process of inscription and re-inscription, is a process of repeating with a difference, a process that necessarily makes something (at least in part) new. For instance, my own work on these verse for the past few hours has, in fact, made them new for me. And, in turn, their newness has made *me* (at least in part) new. There may be a connection of some significance between the command to write and the salvific operation of kenotic transfiguration.

Verse 6

'Then he said to me, "They have come to pass! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a free gift from the spring of the water of life."'

This verse brings us to the problematic that Brandie (I think rightly) identified as central to the constitution of a city that is truly new and holy: the transfiguration of thirst or desire.

Allow me to venture the following hypothesis about how thirst/desire becomes transfigured so as to become new and holy. The key, I think, is given in verse six's description of *how* the water/object of desire is given and the *way* in which it must be received.

There are three parts to this: (1) the water must be freely *given* as a gift, (2) the water must be freely *received* as a gift, and (3) both of these things must happen in such a way that they ramify *life*.

In short, the circulation of desires in the holy city will be shaped by grace: grace for grace, from grace to grace, everyone abandoning possession of themselves in favor of a responsibility for and reception of the other in a grand round of kenotic symmetry. The result is a brilliant burst of light and a flourishing of life.

Verses 7

'Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my sons.'

What is to be conquered here? Is the most likely immediate antecedent “thirst”?

Thirst is conquered insofar as it has been transfigured through the subtraction of any dimension of possessiveness or acquisition, possessiveness having been displaced the kenosis of the gift?

Also, those who conquer will “inherit.” Though, here, to inherit something is qualitatively different from the kind of inheritance familiar to the old heaven and earth. In the old heaven and earth, I only inherit something upon the *death* of the father. Only once the father is *absent* can I acquire and possess and inherit.

Here, however, precisely the opposite is described: inheriting these things from God means that God *comes with* the inheritance *as my God*. As a result, inheritance gives me no possession except for the gift of my kenotic dispossession. Rather than finally being in charge (“I’ve finally inherited the throne, the money, the honor, all for myself!”), I’ve inherited the gift of being an eternally dispossessed, self-emptying servant.

Finally, note that the term “God” is here paired with “sons.” To be a God is correlative to being a son.

Verse 8

'But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.'

The opposite of conquering? First up on the list is being a coward.

To be a coward: to fail to open one's doors, to fail to be "among" or "with".

The marks of cowardice: faithlessness, pollution, violence, fornication, sorcery, idolatry, and (above all) falsehood.

Also, Brandie has already nicely pointed out the juxtaposition of "the waters of life" with "the lake that burns with fire and sulfur." I'd just add that we might read thirst or desire as still being central to this second image as well: the lake of fire burns without respite precisely because it involves a misrelation to desire such that *we are consumed* by these desires. Rather than giving life, they give death. And not just one death, but two: a second death.

Posted by Adam Miller at [10:08 AM](#)

3 comments:

1.



Julie M. Smith [June 6, 2009 at 10:03 AM](#)

First of all, I think omnibus comments are cheating. :)

As for the heaven being new: we could also translate that word as "sky" and so the case could be made that the heavens (=abode of God) are thought to be perfect and only the sky needs renewing. I'm not sure.

I do like your thoughts on separation, particularly since I've encountered some interesting readings of Genesis 1 that construe the creation as a series of separations, with God as the separator. This becomes, I think, particularly interesting when (as you point out later) God is emphatically not separated from his people in this city.

"what brings an end to tears is not necessarily that we each stop crying but that we each wipe each other's tears away"

Fabulous observation.

Reply

2.



Kevin Barney [June 7, 2009 at 5:54 PM](#)

I appreciated the comments on the different senses of something being made "new." That is one of the things that was quite unclear to me when I first read the passage.

Reply

3.



Adam S. Miller June 8, 2009 at 6:48 PM

Julie,

You may be right that we ought to read "heavens" (at least initially) as referring more simply to the "sky" - but this is less exciting :)

Also, though the initial use in verse 1 may more obviously mean something like sky, this is, I think, at least complicated by the way that verse 2 immediately and directly connects the heavens (same word) with that place from which things from God come.

Reply

Revelation 21:18-20

18 And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.

the wall

The wall suggests a clear demarcation between those who are in and those who are out. Scholars note that the revelation is extremely low on imperatives and yet despite this a strongly moralistic view of the world undergirds it: there will be those within the heavenly city, and those outside of it.

jasper

What does it mean to say that the wall was jasper? In Rev 4:3, we find that the person on the throne is "like a jasper." So what does the person on the throne and the wall have in common? Perhaps we are seeing a symbolic representation of Jesus' "I am with you always[s], even unto the end of the world" (Mt 28:20, which is even more interesting in Greek where the "with you" interrupts the "I am" in a striking example of form following function.)

When the holy city descends in 21:11, the light is described as being like a jasper stone. So the one on the throne, the light emanating from the city, and the wall of the city--not to mention one of the foundations of the city (see v19, where jasper gets pride of place as the first foundation)--are all associated with the jasper stone. The point seems to be to suggest a unity between these elements. Unpacking that a little, I would conclude that the city itself is meant to be identified with the one on the throne and that whatever light it has comes from him.

pure and clear

The same Greek word, *katharos*, is used to describe the gold and the glass, even though the KJV chose to translate it once as "pure" and once as "clear." While the semantic range of *katharos* covers both pure and clear (as well as clean), it strikes me as suspect to translate the same word two different ways in the same sentence. One could have translated it as:

The city was clear gold, like clear glass.

The city was pure gold, like pure glass.

And yet both of those would raise their own questions. For the first option, what would it mean to say that gold is clear? For the second, what would it mean to say that the pure gold was like pure glass? (Does this not also imply that it is clear?) Why has the gold lost its opaqueness and become transparent (a word that some translations use here)? If the entire city is transparent, what does that say about life in the city? What might this symbolize?

19 And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; 20 The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysopterus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.

Note that the gems appear to correspond generally to the gems in the high priest's breastplate. (See Exodus 28:17-20; John's list omits four from Exodus and adds four others from the LXX; the order is also different, but the four that have been swapped out appear to be "semantic equivalents" NIGTC, page 1080). The point seems to be that the very foundations of the city are (or: are decorated with) the breastplate of the high priest. What were the functions of the high priest's breastplate? In what ways would the foundation of the new Jerusalem serve those same purposes? It is very difficult, in an LDS context, to avoid the conclusion that in a general sense, the foundation stones of the city are symbols of priesthood authority/power. Exodus 39:8-14 suggests that the breastplate formed a pouch containing the Urim and Thummim, which then would suggest that the entire city here is the (a?) Urim and Thummim. What would that symbolize for the city's residents?

Posted by Julie M. Smith at [9:34 AM](#)

5 comments:



Kevin Barney June 8, 2009 at 11:07 AM

I was intrigued by your translation issue from v. 18. I looked at a few translations, with the following results:

NET and the city is pure gold, like transparent glass [that the same Greek word is used is disclosed in a footnote]

NIV and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass

NASB and the city was pure gold, like clear glass

NRSV while the city is pure gold, clear as glass

NJB and the city of pure gold, like clear glass

Out of this sampling, only the NIV was persuaded that the same GR word should be rendered the same way in such close succession; everyone else chose to give the word a different nuance in its two occurrences here.

Reply



Adam S. Miller June 12, 2009 at 8:29 AM

Julie,

I don't have anything to add to these verses beyond your own comments. I'll just echo a few of your points that especially appreciated:

1. "What does it mean to say that the wall was jasper? In Rev 4:3, we find that the person on the throne is "like a jasper." So what does the person on the throne and the wall have

in common? . . . Unpacking that a little, I would conclude that the city itself is meant to be identified with the one on the throne and that whatever light it has comes from him."

Very nice!

2. "Exodus 39:8-14 suggests that the breastplate formed a pouch containing the Urim and Thummim, which then would suggest that the entire city here is the (a?) Urim and Thummim."

The entire city: "lights and perfections"!

[Reply](#)

3.



[Brandie Siegfried](#) June 15, 2009 at 8:46 AM

Just a few quick thoughts re: how Julie's comments relate to Shon's:

1) Shon's comment about the visionary use of the very high mountain suggests that inspiration of the sort expressed in Revelation requires a special broadening of perspective, something that gives both distance (which suggests a critical/discerning relation to the metaphors about to be developed) and height (perhaps emphasizing a form of transcendence that has more to do with overcoming one's current limitations of experience -- that is, that we acknowledge that we may need to heighten our understanding of the world before what follows will make much sense to us).

2) If we tie the issue of perspective suggested above to the emphasis on transparency and clarity advanced in the verses Julie dealt with, there seems to be something of a tutorial in symbolic engagement going on -- the spectacular images developed throughout these passages are perhaps meant to be understood as both re-orienting our perspective in relation to a "new" kingdom/city/world, even as these images REQUIRE enhanced breadth and height of contemplative ability.

3) I find it interesting that so much of the language having to do with perspective relies on allusions to Old Testament passages where clarity (for instance) is usually bound up in pastoral images emphasizing the beauty of God's justice and mercy in relation to the natural world: the clarity of dew on grass, of sun gleaming on dew, etc. These carefully placed allusions soften, for me, what otherwise seems an overly geometrical and gem-based web of symbols.

4) On amber: a commonplace metonymy in the ancient world for eternal life, preservation/restoration, healing elixirs, etc.

[Reply](#)

4.



[Brandie Siegfried](#) June 16, 2009 at 10:44 AM

When cutting and pasting my last comment, I managed to chop off the question with which I ended. So back to amber: I mention it because I'm wondering if jasper similarly has well-known and often used literary and cultural meanings that would have been immediately recognizable to pre-modern cultures?

Reply



5.

Shon Hopkin June 17, 2009 at 6:38 PM

I appreciated that Brandie brought to our attention the softening allusions to Biblical nature symbols which are present in these verses. I also find the order and symmetry of the holy city very angular ("gem-based" as per Brandie's description) and almost overwhelming. This seems to be a truly "heavenly" city, with a degree of non-human perfection that to me seems in stark contrast with the violent story that has been unfolding in Revelation, with the book's calming interludes focused on the salvation of the Saints. The softening allusions that Brandie mentions connect with the beginning of chapter 21 and the beginning of chapter 22, which actually show real human beings with real needs living in and giving a living, softening beauty to the stark grandeur of the holy city. The introduction of the tree and water in chapter 22 serve a similar purpose for me, giving evidence not just of beauty, but also of real life.

I also really appreciated the connection that Julie made with the Urim and Thummim, which seems to me to have been one of the intentional allusions of the writer of Revelation. This connection is, of course, strengthened for the LDS reader by the modern, scriptural interpretation offered in D&C 130:9 -- "This earth, in its sanctified and immortal state, will be made like unto crystal [note the concept of clearness] and will be a Urim and Thummim to the inhabitants who dwell thereon... and this earth will be Christ's."

Reply

Revelation 21:21-23

Verse 21

"And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass."

The *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* notes regarding pearls that they were known for their "beauty, value, and permanence."

It also, notes, however, that the lavishness of pearls is often associated with the ungodly. Compare, for instance, Revelation 18:12 where the whore of Babylon is characterized as trafficking in "the merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls." In this latter connection, the use of such jewelry as kind of "cover" for one's insufficiency is obvious, the pearl functioning as an "shiny" distraction from the poor substance of that which it bedecks. Also, the pearl, for the whore, is an object of commerce: its value allows for the circulation of Babylonian power throughout the commercial body of its empire.

In these verses, though, the pearl has been recouped. To what end? Primarily to my mystification as to the precise image being proposed :)

Each of the twelve gates are twelve pearls.

Are these giant, seven-foot-round pearls?

By gate do we simply mean an entrance way through the wall (with a pearl framing for the negative space)? Or are we talking about a gate as a door that can swing open and shut? Is a seven-foot-round pearl here placed on hinges? Maybe we are talking about the gate being made from a “slice” or portion of such a pearl?

I honestly don't know.

It is interesting, though, to note the way that such pearls (if they are seven-foot round pearls) would devalue the whore's pearls as merchandise or currency. “Pearls, you foolish whore, are for gates! Don't sell your soul for them!”

Here, in the new city, all such things are rendered “price-less” (or, even, as a result, “worth-less”). Without an assignable value, without the value-pumping assistance of scarcity as a controlled, trafficked, and hoarded resource, the pearl simply shines as what it is: something beautiful, hard, and shiny. Use it as a gate, if you want.

Further, Julie has already raised the issue of “transparent” gold, but it is additionally interesting in this verse that “the street of the city is pure gold.” Note that “street” is here singular rather than plural: “*the* [one?] street of the city is pure gold.”

Why just singular here? Because there is only one “way,” one “truth,” one “life”? Because there is only one place worth going in the city: straight into the presence of God? And this is the road that will take you there?

Verse 22

"And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it."

The *New Interpreter's Bible* notes that “the absence of a temple in the New Jerusalem reflects the triumph of a persistent critical attitude toward templeworship” (725). It then recounts how, from the

start, the temple was compromised by Israel's susceptibility to various local forms of cultic worship such that the temple cult was, from its inception, contaminated by "foreign" influences. This ambivalence toward the temple was also coupled with a deep prophetic ambivalence toward the monarchy itself.

The NIB also notes that, in a similar fashion, in Jesus' day, the temple could remain functional only through collusion with the Roman occupation. The temple, rather than being the "pristine" seat of God's presence, pure of any external defilement, ends up implicating – in its very stones - the powers and problems and defilements of this world. Thus, its absence from the New Jerusalem may mark a definitive end to this bastardization of true worship.

In this same spirit, Karl Barth contrasts the temple with the tabernacle: "the church of the Bible is, significantly, the Tabernacle, the portable tent. The moment it becomes a Temple, it becomes essentially an object of attack" (NIB, 726). Here, the universal "portability" of God's presence is contrasted with the controlled localization of God's presence under the banner of a single nation, a single city, and an exclusive ruling power. God's "temple" is properly a tabernacle, a "moveable feast" that is capable of coming *to* the orphan and the widow.

Also of interest, here, is the claim that God and the Lamb *are* the temple of the new city. Does this simply mark the collapse of a symbolic distance: the temple was meant to symbolically re-present the presence of God but, in light of God's *actual* presence, the re-presentation of this symbol is subsumed?

Also, is it significant that God *and* the Lamb are the temple? The one (single) temple is constructed on the basis of a *relationship*, on the basis of a "sealed" plurality? Could God alone be his own temple? Could the Lamb alone be his own temple? Or, properly speaking, must the temple be God *and* the Lamb? The temple hinging on the vitality of this "and"?

If so, this may give us a way to think about the connection of this image with our contemporary conception of temples. For Mormons, the temple is essentially a complex apparatus of conjunction: its purpose is to gather and seal, gather and seal, Adam *and* Eve *and* Abel *and* Seth *and* . . . *and* . . . *and* . . .

Is the contemporary temple more like a tabernacle than the temple in Jerusalem? Is there a sense in which our temples are "portable," wandering the earth, dotting the face of the whole planet, spreading out into every corner of the globe? Do our temples function as machines for *de*-centralizing the church and *re*-distributing sacrality *away* from one particular place and one particular

people and into the local lives of whatever people need to be conjoined, privileging always the conjunction itself as the site of holiness?

Verse 23

"And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."

A fantastic image. Note that the passage does not say that the sun and moon have "gone away" but that the city doesn't need them. The light of the sun, in the presence of God, is swallowed up like the light from a light bulb with the arrival of the noonday sun?

Also, should we take the two final phrases as synonymous? The glory of God lightening the city = the Lamb being the light of it? Or does the second phrase qualify and articulate the nature of God's glory: the glory of God that lightens the city *is* the Lamb? Here, again, foregrounding the importance of the "and" that conjoins God and the Lamb: God's glory is (not his own) but (the other,) the Lamb?

Posted by Adam Millerat [2:07 PM](#)

7 comments:

1.



Kevin Barney [June 16, 2009 at 6:24 PM](#)

I agree with your fourth paragraph under v. 22. My reading is that the physical temple is subsumed and therefore unnecessary due to the actual presence of God and the Lamb. No need for a symbolic representation of the divine presence when you've got the real deal.

[Reply](#)

2.



Shon Hopkin [June 17, 2009 at 9:43 PM](#)

My follow-up comments will also connect to your fourth paragraph. I am interested in the concept of "sacred space," and find it interesting that the only time that the attribute of holiness is explicitly tied to land in the biblical text is in Moses' experience with the burning bush in Exodus 3:5 -- "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

In my view, it would appear that holiness and space/place should be tied to the presence of deity. In this thinking it is God who alone can impart holiness to other things, making space holy. Human behaviors can defile holy space, and they can also prepare space which would be appropriate for the divine presence, but human behaviors don't make places holy -- encounters with the divine do. The ultimate sacred space/location, of course, as stated by Adam and Kevin,

is not the temple, but is God's divine presence.

I'm also interested in God and the Lamb as the source of the light. In the holy of holies in the tabernacle and in Solomon's temple, it appears that there was not an earthly source of light, signifying that God, symbolically seated on the ark of the covenant, should be the only source of light. Rather than being heliocentric, this concept might be called deocentric (I think I just made that word up.) :) In a heliocentric setting, the light would come from outside of the holy city. However, since light is a source of life, enables sight and perception, and provides knowledge, it makes good sense that the light of the New Jerusalem must be found right at its center, where the Divine presence is located.

By the way, this image of God and the Lamb at the center of a physical city works easily for most Latter-day Saint readers. For the most part we don't have a problem with God being located in a specific, physical place. Would it be worth some space for someone to discuss how this might be interpreted/viewed by other Christian readers? I don't mean to move us away from the task at hand, but it is a question that came to me as I was pondering God's location at the center of the city.

Reply

3.



Adam S. Miller June 18, 2009 at 6:55 AM

Shon notes:

"By the way, this image of God and the Lamb at the center of a physical city works easily for most Latter-day Saint readers. For the most part we don't have a problem with God being located in a specific, physical place. Would it be worth some space for someone to discuss how this might be interpreted/viewed by other Christian readers? I don't mean to move us away from the task at hand, but it is a question that came to me as I was pondering God's location at the center of the city."

I wonder, Shon, if it might be easier for those not committed to a corporeal God to read this passage in a more literal way.

If God isn't "limited" to any one physical location, then his presence could always shine and light up the city from within. But if God can only be in one spatial location at a time, then Mormons might have to address the fact that God won't always be in this one particular spot (at the center of the city). What happens if he goes some place else, to do something else? Does the city go dark?

Either way, though, I'm unsure about how literally we should take these images. I don't actually think the passages are problematic for Mormons or more traditional Christians (at least in this respect). But I think it's an interesting question nonetheless.

Reply

4.



Shon Hopkin June 19, 2009 at 12:16 PM

Thanks, Adam. Your thoughts are helpful and I completely agree.

Reply

5.



Julie M. Smith June 20, 2009 at 1:12 PM

Great post, thanks.

(Reminds me of the old joke about the rich man who, after much pleading, was permitted to bring a suitcase full of his wealth into heaven. He had to open it to show the contents to Saint Peter who furrowed his brow and asked, "Why did you bring paving stones?")

I wish I had something to add to the pearl discussion, except that we have no OT references (unless there is something in the LXX that got lost in translation?). I really like your analysis that the colossal size of the pearl is enough to render moot all human conceptions of wealth. This idea does play into our other NT uses of pearl (pearl of great price, cast pearls before swine).

Has anyone commented on number symbolism yet? The twelve gates/pearls reminds me of the Twelve Tribes, twelve apostles, and other symbols of authority/priesthood. It is through the gates/priesthood that we enter into the eternal city.

I'm going to disagree with The New Interpreter's Bible on the missing temple (and answer in the affirmative the question you ask later): I don't think it reflects criticism of the temple. The city is built along the same dimensions as the Holy of Holies, features the gems from the high priest's breastplate (which was associated with their temple work) and the entire city enjoys God's presence. It doesn't have a temple because it IS a temple.

But mashing up some of Shon's comments from an earlier post with what we have here, I think the gem-encrusted perfect angularity of this city does contrast with the flapping, dusty, temporary tabernacle. Jesus did away with that temple/tabernacle when its curtain (which separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the structure) ripped from top to bottom when he died for us (see Mark 15:38).

I love your observation about the temple as a "sealed" relationship. Given that we've already overlapped the temple and bride imagery, it seems we'd have an open door to see evidence of a divine feminine here as a part of that sealed relationship.

(I'm going to post this and continue in a new comment because my computer is acting up.)

Reply

6.



Julie M. Smith June 20, 2009 at 1:20 PM

Just one more note:

The imagery of the gold may be playing off of 1 Kings 6:30, where Solomon covers the floor of the temple with gold. (This would support my idea that the entire city is a temple.)

Reply



Adam S. Miller June 22, 2009 at 1:57 PM

Julie says:

"I'm going to disagree with The New Interpreter's Bible on the missing temple (and answer in the affirmative the question you ask later): I don't think it reflects criticism of the temple. The city is built along the same dimensions as the Holy of Holies, features the gems from the high priest's breastplate (which was associated with their temple work) and the entire city enjoys God's presence. It doesn't have a temple because it IS a temple."

I like this reading as well. Though I wonder if a temple that has been stretched into a giant cubic *city* doesn't involve more differences than similarities with the old notion of a "temple"?

Revelation 21:24-27

24 And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.

The phrase "of them which are saved" is not in the best ancient manuscripts. My guess is that that phrase was added by someone used to the biblical idea that "the nations" means "people who are not part of the covenant" and therefore found this verse in need of some explanation. Yet without that phrase, there is some nice poetic parallelism in this verse:

And the nations / shall walk / in the light of it
And the kings of the earth / do bring their glory and honor / into it.

Both nations and earthly kings are usual enemies of the covenant people, but the reversal of this new city is so complete that these groups live by its light and, instead of hoarding glory to themselves, empty out their glory into the city. There is no more opposition; the usual opponents are now on the side of the righteous. I think it is more effective to take this verse as a symbolic indication of complete reversal of expected human behavior--applicable to all aspects of life--than to read it as solely political and literal.

Do we understand the kings to be actually entering into the city? Is the light of the city extending outside of the city (for the nations to walk in)? Or are the nations in the city? If the nations and/or kings are in the city, this is an even more challenging verse for the biblical worldview.

25 And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.

(This may impinge on our discussion of the pearl gates: they are something that can be closed, but in reality they never are.)

"By day" means "any day." In other words, the city is under no threat from the outside that would necessitate closing the gates. (Even with all of those kings and nations loitering around the place!) (This verse also pictures the fulfillment of Isaiah 60:11). And nighttime, the usual time of threat and attack, doesn't even exist! The light is so great that the night has no sway. This verse emphasizes the light without even mentioning it.

26 And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it.

This is a curious verse with its echo of the end of v24. Literarily, it works quite well since the city of v25 is literally surrounded in v24 and v26 with references to entry into it. There's also a bit of a chiasm formed:

A And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it:

B and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.
C And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day:
C' for there shall be no night there.
B' And they shall bring the glory and honour
A' of the nations into it.

If we read it this way, then the repetition from v24 to v26 serves to emphasize the parallelism between the two phrases of v24 and encourages us to reconsider what "and the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day" has to do with "for there shall be no night there." Those two phrases have a nice bit of antithetic parallelism due to the references to "night" and "day." There is something about that line, however, that I can't quite get my mind around: why does the absence of night explain why the gates are not closed during the day?

27 And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

No unclean person enters, and yet the gates are never closed. They are not physically restrained.

The second phrase doesn't make reference to those who are clean or pure, as we might expect in an antithetical verse such as this one, but rather to those whose names are written. Having your name written is the opposite of being defiled. Perhaps this points to the idea that we do not make ourselves clean, but it is only through the mediating action of the Lamb. And what of the book? Why would writing names in a book be a good metaphor for his atoning actions?

We've had several threads of text related to the idea of writing . . . perhaps someone should weave those into a paper.
Posted by Julie M. Smith at [1:24 PM](#)

3 comments:

1.



Adam S. Miller June 26, 2009 at 10:33 AM

Julie,

As usual, I appreciate your notes here. Two points which I noted in particular.

1. Regarding verse 24 you say:

'I think it is more effective to take this verse as a symbolic indication of complete reversal of expected human behavior.'

I agree that a more expansive reading is productive here.

2. Also, you say:

'If we read it this way [i.e., as a kind of chiasm], then the repetition from v24 to v26 serves to emphasize the parallelism between the two phrases of v24 and encourages us to reconsider what "and the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day" has to do with "for there shall be no night there.'

I'll try to address this point in my notes below. (Note: the bad translations "cited" below are my own, with reference to the NRSV.)

Verse 24

"And the *ethne* will walk around by the light of it, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it."

You raise a good question about whether the *ethne* are in the city or not.

I wonder if “peripatating” gives the impression that they are still “walking around,” going about their own business for the most part, but now in light of the city.

If so, this might not be a bad description of the celestial or terrestrial kingdoms: these are places lit up by the glory of God, but people there still continue wandering around with their own business (rather than God’s) in mind.

Also, I wonder if the kings of the earth bringing their glory into the city isn’t a bit like the joke you referenced in an earlier comment where the rich man brings his suitcase of gold with him into a city whose streets are already paved with gold.

Verse 25

“And the gates of it will never be shut by day, for night will not be there.”

I wonder if the *gar* that begins the second phrase (rather than a simple *kaí*) might not allow us to infer a more properly logical or causal relationship between these two phrases. (Though it looks like the KJV already has a “for” rather than the NRSV’s “and.”) If so, perhaps we should read the disappearance of “night” in the same vein as the disappearance of the sea. The absence of the night (i.e., of any opposing force of chaos) *accounts for* why the gates can always stay open. Otherwise, like you, I’m not sure how to connect them other than poetically.

Verse 27

“But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices any profane thing or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

It is interesting that people who do profane/common (*koinon*) things won’t be allowed in the city. Perhaps within the walls of the city, even the things that *used to be* “common” or banal have now become sacred. Making dinner? Giving the kids a bath? Taking out the trash? None of them are “profane” anymore within the walls of the city.

Interesting too that “falsehood” is contrasted with “being written in the Lamb’s book of life.” Classically, writing per se is disparaged because (in the absence of the author) it opens the door to falsehood and misunderstanding. But here the Lamb’s book of life is what excludes falsehood. Here, the doubling via inscription of someone’s identity serves to seal or confirm their life rather than open the possibility of an infidelity by means of that doubling (deception necessarily involving some kind of “duplicité”). In general, though, I’m not quite sure what to do with the different references to writing that we’ve seen so far. But I agree it would be an interesting project to take up.

Reply

2.



Shon Hopkin June 27, 2009 at 2:14 PM

Julie, you mentioned:

“Do we understand the kings to be actually entering into the city? Is the light of the city extending outside of the city (for the nations to walk in)? Or are the nations in the city? If the nations and/or kings are in the city, this is an even more challenging verse for the biblical

worldview."

These are great possible interpretations.

I also appreciated Adam's response to your thoughts, which offered some connected, possible answers/interpretations.

There is a similar issue in 22:2 (which I'll be commenting on next week). With regards to the tree of life, it states: "and the leaves of the tree for the healing of nations." Does this mean that the nations come to the tree to be healed? Or are the leaves carried by those within the city out to the nations, where they are used to heal those nations? Or do the healing properties of the leaves extend outward from the holy city, blessing the nations without the need for anyone to carry them? This last interpretation would certainly tie in to the Rabbinic concept of sacred space, which saw the holiest place on earth as the Holy of Holies of the temple, with decreasing degrees of holiness radiating outwards from the temple in concentric circles, so that the power of the temple blessed the entire world. Either of the latter two possibilities I mention above could also coincide with Adam's comments about the terrestrial and celestial kingdoms, who are certainly healed by the power of the atonement, but do not necessarily enjoy admittance into the holy city. Or, if we decided that the nations come into the city to be healed, then I think we would need to view these as a complete reversal of previous realities, so that even the persistent symbol of the nations for worldliness is reversed and all is made clean and new in this new order of things. Certainly, according to an LDS viewpoint, those who are left on earth after the 2nd coming will be the more honorable citizens of the nations of the world and could conceivably have entrance into the holy city.

[Reply](#)

3.



[Brandie Siegfried](#) July 1, 2009 at 3:37 PM

Julie, I very much enjoyed reading your notes and especially appreciated (as did Adam) your point about writing as a theme needing some special scrutiny.

I also enjoyed both Adam's and Shon's responses to your post.

In response to Adam regarding kinds of writing: what categories do you see so far? Sometimes writing is about recording/witnessing; at other times it seems related to the issue of inheritance and tracing relations between God and children/servants; there also seems to be plenty of exclamatory or expressive writing, meant to communicate the state of the soul when contemplating the mercy and justice of God.

Because we're mostly talking scrolls and paper-ish records for the earliest documents, my longed-for connection between Adam's comment and Shon's questions regarding carrying leaves must languish for the time being (leaves or pages on metal plates/records could do it, but not so much for Revelations . . . unless there is a metal plate copy somewhere?).

Shon's comment about being healed without being able to enter the holy city has me wondering what it means to be healed. To be mobile but restricted? To be whole but apart? What, actually, does that mean in Mormon theology?

[Reply](#)

Revelation 22:1-3

1: And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2: In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3: And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:

Overview – This pericope ties the imagery of the holy city directly to the Garden of Eden. The water of life reminds the reader of the river proceeding “out of Eden to water the garden” (Gen 2:10-14). The water in the holy city waters the tree of life, just as the river in Eden watered the garden, in which was found the first tree of life. Finally, explicit reference to the “curse” (*katathema* – Gr.) is made. As Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, God had placed a “curse” (*arur* – Heb.) upon the ground, that it would bring forth thorns and thistles. The world became a wilderness and the effects of this curse were mentioned with regularity by biblical authors and prophets. When the people returned to God, prophets promised a reversal of the effects of the curse, and promises were made that in the last days the land would return to its Edenic, pre-curse state. Instead of the land making life more difficult for the descendants of Adam and Eve, it could support them and even heal them, as with the leaves of the tree of life (vs. 2).

A good example of this curse reversal is found in Isaiah 55:7-13 – “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon... Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.” Another example of curse reversal shows how water could heal a dry wilderness. This example is found in connection with a reversal of the difficulty of child birth that came to Eve as a result of the fall – “Thus saith the Lord... Fear not, O Jacob, my servant... For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses” (Is 44:2-4).

In these verses from Revelation, the curse has truly been reversed. The sorrows and pains promised to Eve (Gen 3:16) are taken away as “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are done away. (21:4)” The “former things” have been reversed as well in the ability of the ground to bring forth life without the toil and sweat of man, as with the tree of life found in the midst of the city.

Verse 1 – *and he showed me* This section begins with a reminder that there is an angelic tour guide for John’s vision of the holy city. This is the third time that the angel, who was one of the seven angels holding the seven vials of plagues (21:9), has been mentioned. As discussed earlier, Nephi is also guided in his vision by an angel who constantly points out different items of import (compare the angel’s commands to “Look!” in 1 Ne 11 with “And he shewed me” of Rev 22). Ezekiel also had an angelic guide in his vision of a temple that had many characteristics in common with the holy city of Revelation – flowing water, specific measurements, etc. What is the importance of the heavenly guide? Does his presence signify that the nature of the city is far above that of a temporal city and is not the type of location that could be accessed by an earthly explorer? Does his presence indicate that God has authorized this vision, or that God wants to make sure that the vision is viewed and understood correctly? If the holy city symbolizes a return to the paradise of Eden, then the angel might be considered necessary. Since cherubim were placed to guard the way to the tree of life, as a result of the curse on Adam and Eve, then theoretically an angel would be required to permit access back to the tree of life.

Verses 1 & 2 – *water of life* (vs. 1); *tree of life* (vs. 2) The images of nature, life, and motion represented by the water of life and the tree of life soften the angular, brilliant beauty of the perfectly-proportioned city. This is a city that can be lived in. It is not just a perfected, modern, cement-city devoid of any evidences of God’s creation, but instead contains central reminders of the creation and the Garden of Eden story. The water flows from the throne of God, much like water flows from the temple in Ezekiel’s vision (Ez 47:1). There has been quite a bit of excellent discussion about whether the image of Rev 21-22 is anti-temple, since it replaces the Old Testament version of the temple as a central source of communal life with God and the Lamb as the central source of life. The author of Revelation purposefully connected the images of his vision with those of Ezekiel’s temple vision (Ezekiel 40-48). To me it seems that he did this not to discount or discredit the earlier, temple-centered vision, but to show the perfect realization and triumph of the symbolic truths offered by the temple – that God can dwell in the midst of his people and that the chaos of a fallen world can be

conquered by the order and beauty of the heavens.

Verse 1 – *clear as crystal* Enough comments have been offered already on the “clear” color and quality of the gold of the holy city. This recurring quality, connected now with the waters of life, reveals it as a very important image for the author. Could the clearness symbolize clarity, sight, and even clairvoyance (a power required if one is to have a vision of heavenly things)? The LDS reader might be reminded of the opposite imagery in Lehi’s vision of the fountain of water that ran near to the tree of life. In Lehi’s/Nephi’s vision, the waters were “filthy” (1 Ne 12:16), were repugnant to Nephi, and symbolized the depths of hell. Nephi’s later love of simplicity and clarity might have some connection to the repugnance of these hellish waters, as might his focus on the importance of the sanctifying waters of baptism (2 Ne 31:4-6). It is interesting that when discussing the importance of entering into the waters of baptism he referred back to images he had seen in his pivotal vision.

Verse 2 – *in the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, the tree of life* Like the pearls/gates of Rev 21:21, this is a difficult image for me to mentally solidify. The tree is in the middle of the street (also from 21:21). It is also on either side of the river, but it seems to be one tree (xulon) in the singular (in contrast to the connected image from Ez 47:12, that has many trees growing on both sides of the river, with fruit that lasts through the seasons and leaves that are for medicine). The tree of Rev 22:2 appears to be in more places than is physically possible. Does the river run down both sides of the road, and a gigantic tree (picture redwood forests, but bigger) span them all? Does the road follow along both sides of the river and the tree spans the river, but not the road, thus standing in the middle of the road? Does the road cross the river as a bridge, with the river running through the middle of the tree (so that the tree can be on either side of the river) and the bridge splitting in two so that the tree can be in its center? Does the tree send out shoots, so that there are numerous trees that are only one tree? This type of concrete solidifying of the vision appears to be almost impossible, and may be exactly what the description was designed to prevent. The tree is almost ubiquitous, and becomes a dominant image in the city. It is also connected with the image of the street/way and the water of life in a way that emphasizes their interdependence. I am reminded of the famous verse from John 14:6, when Christ describes himself as “the way, the truth, and they life.” He is all of these things at the same time, and the life-giving tree, the street that guides to God and the Lamb and its center, and the renewing river of water all symbolize together the multi-faceted joys and glories of celestial redemption and eternal life with God. These three images could also be seen as symbolic manifestations or descriptions of God and the Lamb, who stand at the center of the city. Either from an LDS viewpoint, or from the perspective of traditional Christianity, these three images would be a beautiful way to describe the unity and uniqueness of each member of the Godhead.

Verse 2 – *twelve fruits... and the leaves of the tree for the healing of the nations* The number “twelve” is emphasized again here. This time a new connection to the repeating cycle of twelve months is given, in addition to the previous connections with the tribes of Israel and the apostles of the Lamb. Are Israel and the apostles (the destinies of God’s Old and New Testament organizations?) to be woven inextricably into the eternal cycle of time? It is somewhat surprising that months and time are even alluded to in a heavenly city where the light of God’s glory never sets. However, mentioning months and the constant flowering of the tree can serve as a reminder that there is a new order of things now -- the ongoing progression of months doesn’t lead to winter and death, but instead the tree continues producing fruit throughout the year.

The image of the tree of life is a persistent one in many world religions, and also becomes important in the story of the Book of Mormon. How does this tree of life in the holy city compare to the tree of life in the Garden of Eden, that had to be guarded by cherubim? How does it compare to the burning bush of Moses’ vision, with God in the midst of the bush? How does it compare to the tree of life in Lehi’s/Nephi’s dream/vision, that people approached after considerable effort, that produced a fruit “desirable above all other fruits,” and that people could abandon even after having partaken of its fruit? How does it compare to the tree of Alma 32, that grows within an individual after the planting and nourishing of a seed, and that also produces fruit in the end? There is a lot of room for “fruitful” discussion, I believe, in analyzing the similarities and differences in these different manifestations of the tree of life.

Verse 3 – *the throne of God* At the focal point of the tabernacle was found the ark of the covenant, also known as the mercy seat, symbolizing God’s presence. Inside of the mercy seat were found stone tablets containing the law of Moses, Aaron’s rod that had miraculously bloomed, and manna from the trek through the wilderness. These objects teach what the presence of God does, since it was His power and presence that allowed them to come among the children of Israel. God provides law and order in the midst of chaos, as symbolized by the stone tablets. He provides new life, even on a rod that could not possibly bloom any longer. He provides food in the midst of the wilderness. Even so the throne of

God in the holy city is found to give evidence that the curse has been done away with. God provides order (as the symbol of a kingly throne demonstrates), food (from the tree of life), and life (from the flowing waters).

Posted by [Shon Hopkin](#) at [9:33 AM](#)

6 comments:

1.



Brandie Siegfried July 1, 2009 at 5:50 PM

I found your notes, here, particularly interesting, Shon. I especially appreciate the question regarding Israel's place in the "eternal cycle of time." It would be interesting to think about the different ways to calendar time when Revelations was written, and the way in which a certain tradition for dividing the year is appropriated to such interesting ends in the vision.

A few quick comments:

I know that over the past couple of weeks we've been using the term reversal to characterize what I have assumed to mean "a return to a desired state." But as you discuss the reversal of the curse of Eden, it sounds as if you might also be including other meanings: to turn upsidedown, to overthrow, to cause to move in the opposite direction (perhaps in order to return, but also to halt the trajectory).

I haven't been in the habit, I'll confess, of thinking of the consequences of Eve's choice as a curse in the traditional sense, though the outcomes you outline are naturally more challenging than what seems to have gone before. I guess my question is really this: in what sense is the curse reversed? We don't want to lose the consequences of knowledge, experience, growth, etc., but we do want to enter the Eternal city. Is that possible with experience? Or does experience ultimately have to give something back, invert somehow, and become innocence again? This is really a question about what we believe is accomplished by Jesus's life, death, and life.

Part of this might also be a question about the relationship of the two major symbols in Eden, the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Are their root systems connected? Are they really two different trees, or the same one understood differently depending on perspective?

My next comment is in response to your beautifully expressed point about the link to Eden and the organic components of the city: "Verses 1 & 2 – water of life (vs. 1); tree of life (vs. 2) The images of nature, life, and motion represented by the water of life and the tree of life soften the angular, brilliant beauty of the perfectly-proportioned city. This is a city that can be lived in. It is not just a perfected, modern, cement-city devoid of any evidences of God's creation, but instead contains central reminders of the creation and the Garden of Eden story. The water flows from the throne of God, much like water flows from the temple in Ezekiel's vision."

This is great. I might even push it further. I'll do that in a second post -- I'm being told there is a 4,096 character limit to my comment.

Reply

2.



Brandie Siegfried July 1, 2009 at 5:52 PM

As I was saying, I might even push it further and say that what is being revealed over these repetitions as we move through the various visionary segments, is the fact that the tree of life, and the water of life, are actually the roots/wellspring of the Divine abode. In which case, these images aren't softening the angular brilliance of an otherwise overly-boxy geometry of perfection, but are the symbols for what makes such forms (the rectitude of justice, the straightness of the way of truth, etc.) even possible. I like the word abode, by the way, because it can simultaneously mean both one's home, and one's sojourn. I mention this because it seems to me that in Mormon theology, there is considerable room for conflating the two -- that a true home (as a place of being and relating) somehow always requires sojourn. Eden's double tree embodies this, to some degree.

Your last three paragraphs are practically poetic and remind me that in nature, fruitfulness often results from what appears to be a kind of chaos -- and yet, upon closer inspection, there is often not much difference between the order of geometry and the chaos of life. Orderly chaos is that lovely term so often used to explain geometries and calculus in nature. I wonder, in short, if at this point in Revelation the "high" perspective offered is that there is more to the "chaos of the fallen world" than mere chaos.

If trees and flowing water are at the heart of the Divine abode, then some of what may have seemed disorderly is really only that -- a seeming disorder, the result of an inability to recognize and appreciate the orderly purpose of things as they are meant to abide.

That is to say, Divine order may appear chaotic to eyes lacking wisdom, lacking the sustenance and clarity of vision engendered by the fruit of the trees described here. What do you think?

[Reply](#)

3.



[Kevin Barney](#) July 2, 2009 at 7:56 PM

Brandie, I personally am rather partial to the idea that the two trees of the Garden were in reality a single tree, described as two trees either from different perspectives, as you say, or for the needs of the story perhaps.

[Reply](#)

4.



[Adam S. Miller](#) July 8, 2009 at 1:39 PM

Shon, this is excellent work and I'm grateful for it. I've added a few of my own (belated) comments below.

1. Shon says: **"The tree is almost ubiquitous, and becomes a dominant image in the city. It is also connected with the image of the street/way and the water of life in a way that emphasizes their interdependence. I am reminded of the famous verse from John 14:6, when Christ describes himself as "the way, the truth, and they life." He is all of these things at the same time, and the life-giving tree, the street that guides to God and the Lamb and its center, and the renewing river of water all symbolize together the multi-faceted joys and glories of celestial redemption and eternal life with God."**

I don't actually have anything to add to this -- but I did want to repeat and draw additional

attention to it.

2. Shon also says: **“The number “twelve” is emphasized again here. This time a new connection to the repeating cycle of twelve months is given, in addition to the previous connections with the tribes of Israel and the apostles of the Lamb. Are Israel and the apostles (the destinies of God’s Old and New Testament organizations?) to be woven inextricably into the eternal cycle of time? It is somewhat surprising that months and time are even alluded to in a heavenly city where the light of God’s glory never sets.”**

With Brandie, I really like this question. And I really like the image of this world’s own branching family order (the house of Israel) being incorporated into that eternal structure of life. Perhaps we could stretch the image and see this as involving two intertwining trees: our world’s own tree of life (that genealogical tree that is Adam’s family) being intertwined with the eternal tree of life.

3. Brandie says: **“We don't want to lose the consequences of knowledge, experience, growth, etc., but we do want to enter the Eternal city. Is that possible with experience? Or does experience ultimately have to give something back, invert somehow, and become innocence again? This is really a question about what we believe is accomplished by Jesus's life, death, and life. Part of this might also be a question about the relationship of the two major symbols in Eden, the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Are their root systems connected? Are they really two different trees, or the same one understood differently depending on perspective?”**

With Shon, I’m very sympathetic to the idea that the tree of life and the tree of knowledge are really the same tree seen from two different perspectives. But even without this, I think that a Mormon theology would need to see their roots as productively intertwined in a way that traditional approaches would not. As Brandie mentions, we might want to think about salvation more as a kind of transcendent recuperation than as a straightforward reversal. The last thing we want is for things to go back to the way they were in the garden of Eden! But I’ve strayed quite a bit here from the text itself.

4. Brandie says: **”Orderly chaos is that lovely term so often used to explain geometries and calculus in nature. I wonder, in short, if at this point in Revelation the "high" perspective offered is that there is more to the "chaos of the fallen world" than mere chaos.”**

“Orderly chaos” is a nice turn of phrase and it nicely captures the way in which the heavenly city doesn’t simply dispense with “chaos” but incorporates or sublates it. Though the (chaotic) *waters* of the sea have been banished, the *water* of life nonetheless flows from the throne of God itself, from the very heart of the city!

Reply

5.



Julie M. Smith July 11, 2009 at 1:25 PM

Thank you for this post.

The tree is such an interesting symbol. I'd add that I think Daniel Peterson's work "Nephi and His Asherah" might be relevant here. (Can't get the link to work, but if you google the title, you'll find it easily.)

I love your thoughts on the symbolism of the items in the ark.

Perhaps someone should consider writing about time markers in Revelation.

Brandie, I'm intrigued by the idea of the trees in the garden being one; perhaps the impenetrable description of the tree in Revelation hints at this idea as well.

[Reply](#)

6.



[Shon Hopkin](#) **July 16, 2009 at 5:52 PM**

This is a belated response to the thought-provoking comments added to 22:1-3. (I've been out of the country for the past two weeks.) The conversation string that intrigued me most was a combination of Brandie's questions with Kevin's and Adam's statements about the interconnectedness of the tree of life and tree of knowledge.

Brandie asked: "I guess my question is really this: in what sense is the curse reversed? We don't want to lose the consequences of knowledge, experience, growth, etc., but we do want to enter the Eternal city. Is that possible with experience? Or does experience ultimately have to give something back, invert somehow, and become innocence again? This is really a question about what we believe is accomplished by Jesus's life, death, and life."

These are profound questions and very important ones in the context of LDS theology, which places a very high value on the knowledge and experience gained through the trials and difficulties of a fallen world. With the lens of Brandie's last statement, the atonement of Christ does not just serve to return us to a state of innocent and naive bliss (as some would picture the peaceful cherubic angels of heaven), but possibly His atonement connects with our life experiences and cleanses them in a way that makes them (and us) holy. We do not lose the knowledge that comes from our experience and even our mistakes -- in other words the difficult experiences don't disappear -- but instead we are made whole and holy through the intersection of our experiences and the atonement of Christ. These are just some random musings spurred by Brandie's thoughts, and hopefully I won't look back at them later and wonder what I was thinking. :)

[Reply](#)

Revelation 22:4-7

Verse 4: "They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads."

I'm reminded by this passage of my favorite Psalm (the translation is Robert Alters):

One thing do I ask of the Lord,
it is this that I seek –
that I dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to behold the Lord's sweetness
and to gaze on his palace. . . .

Hear, O Lord, my voice when I call,
and grant me grace and answer me.
Of you, my heart said: "Seek My face."
Your face, Lord, I do seek.

Do not hide your face far from me
(Ps. 27:4, 7-8)

In general, however, I'm not sure where to begin with respect to the question of the "face."

Here we have a face that is "seen" and no longer hidden by a veil of any kind. Yet (as in Emmanuel Levinas' profound phenomenological analyses of the face-to-face encounter) there are few moments when we are *more* struck by the transcendent *inaccessibility* of the other person than when we are brought face to face with them.

In the other person's absence it is not so difficult to pretend that we "know" them, have taken their measure, and have a handle on who they are. But, brought face to face with the other, this pretension evaporates.

Why? Because when we come face to face with the other, it is no longer the case that we are simply seeing them. Rather, face to face, we see them *and* we see ourselves *being seen*. Face to face, we find ourselves gripped by *their* inaccessible gaze. We discover that there is another perspective from which the world unfolds and that, in fact, we are *not* (as we pretend) the center of the universe.

There is a kind of nakedness in this revelation as we bear our own bareness in the eyes of the other. Exposed to what we see required of us (and from us) in the other's face - exposed to our responsibility to them and for them - we are simultaneously exposed to what we *cannot* see in this face that exceeds us.

The revelatory intimacy of this face to face encounter hinges on just such an exposure: I both see and see myself being seen by something that I cannot see.

Of the immense number of things, then, that could be said about having "his name on our foreheads," I'll suggest only this: it is the essence of such a face to face encounter that it inscribes the other's name in us.

Having seen their face, having seen ourselves being seen, we continue to bear both the other's name and a responsibility for what that name/face revealed to us about them and ourselves. And here, insofar as God's name is a metonym for every other face - "inasmuch as you've done it unto the least of these, you've done it unto me" - bearing God's name on our foreheads means that we bear the name of *all* the other others who need assistance from us.

A final note: it is especially interesting that we bear this name in a place where it will be visible to *everyone* else we see . . . but, simultaneously, in a place where it is *not* visible to us. Our only access to this name (this name that we bear inscribed in our own flesh!) is through the eyes of others.

Verse 5: "And night will no longer be, and they have no need of the light of a lamp or the light of the sun because the Lord God will give forth light on them, and they will reign into the ages of the ages."

This recapitulation of the promise already given in 21:23 nicely rounds out the end of the vision proper.

Verse 6-7: "And he said to me, 'These words are faithful and true, and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place. Behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is the one keeping the words of the prophecy of this book.'"

These verses mark the end of the vision and the transition to the book's "concluding sayings." They call our attention back to the role of the messenger/angel, the status of the recipients as "servants," and emphasize the imminence of all of the dread/beautiful events that were foretold.

"The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets" is an interesting locution. God is here identified as "the one who is on the side of the prophets." Also, insofar as the "spirits" (pneumatons) are cognate with breath, we might hear an echo of God's being on the side of the "breath" of the prophets (i.e., on the side of the words that they breathed out on God's own behalf).

Interesting, also, that blessedness is here directly tied to a text/book. Righteous living in general is not addressed. Rather, blessedness is tied to "keeping" *the words* of the prophecy of the book. I'd like to address this further (in connection with

the rest of what we've hinted about the importance of words, writing, texts, etc.), but I'm simply out of time. So, for the moment, I'll simply lay down another (hopeful!) promissory marker with respect to this question.

Posted by Adam Miller at [1:39 PM](#)

9 comments:

1.



Julie M. Smith July 11, 2009 at 1:56 PM

Adam, thank you for this post.

In thinking about verse 4 (and maybe your reference to a psalm took me in this direction), I feel that there is some parallelism in the verse that might be worth exploring. I am wondering what exactly the relationship is between "seeing his face" and "having his name on their foreheads." Does the first cause the second? Does the second cause the first? Are they equivalencies in some sense? (And, if so, how?) Something else?

Another thought on v4: I've read that the 'name on the forehead' is alluding to the practice of branding (or tattooing) the name of an owner onto the forehead of a slave. If that is the meaning here, then I suppose the suggestion is that we cannot see God until we confess that He is our master. As you point out, when that name is on our forehead, all the world can see it. In other words, when we accept God as our master, it is obvious to all others. (Except ourselves? I don't know.)

V5 is privileged as the "final word" of the vision. There is probably a lot that could be said about this, but I'll just note that I like the idea that God's light is what allows them to reign forever, and that this is the climax of the vision.

Reply

2.



Adam S. Miller July 14, 2009 at 2:02 PM

Of foreheads, *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* says:

“The two dozen references to foreheads in the Bible fall into three main clusters. The most numerous are references to the forehead as a place where one wears an identifying mark, either literal or figurative. At the institution of the Passover, Moses told the people that the perpetual remembrance of God's deliverance of them would be as a reminder and emblem 'on your forehead (Ex 13:9 16 NRSV). In his farewell discourse, Moses commanded that his words should be fixed 'as an emblem on your forehead' (Deut 6:8; 11:18 NRSV). The engraved gold signet bearing the motto 'holy to the Lord' was worn by Aaron on his forehead as God's designated high priest (Ex 28:36-38). In apocalyptic visions, people's foreheads receive marks of identity, either good (sometimes for purposes of protection) or bad . . . Jeremiah 3:3 uses the image of 'the forehead of the whore' to picture someone who refuses to be ashamed.

“Second, the hardness of the forehead made it a symbol of stubbornness and rebelliousness (Is 48:4; Ezek 3:7). The positive side of the image is that it can also picture the courage and persistence of a good person in standing up to evil (Ezek 3:8-9).

“Third, the condition of a person's forehead was crucial to a priest's determination of whether or not a person had leprosy . . .

“The most famous forehead in the Bible is Goliath's.”

Some good stuff here.

[Reply](#)

3.



Brandie Siegfried July 14, 2009 at 3:29 PM

Adam, thanks for a particularly moving reading of Revelation -- easily one of the most useful applications of Levinas I've seen in a while (after reading your post, I'm tempted to say that for modern readers, Revelation needs Levinas).

I've been thinking about what sort of blessed people won't need the light of a lamp or the sun. One possibility is that in addition to light being given "forth on them," perhaps it is given forth through them -- where such people stand, dark things (or, the things for which darkness stands as a metonymy) simply cannot exist. Hunger, pain, sickness, hatred, violence, injustice, etc., are made impossible by the capabilities of such servants.

We could stretch this to include the previously discussed possibilities inherent in "higher" perspectives. Perhaps darkness cannot exist in the sense that such people have become the embodiment of discernment/wisdom/etc., and this "light" makes other forms of light seem dim or superfluous.

I like Julie's suggestion regarding parallelism. D&C 88:45-50 suggests that discerning God in all of creation marks our ability to comprehend not only our own proper place in the scheme of things, but something of the divine nature as well. Given that both Revelations and the D&C are at pains to give us some sense of divine perspectives on power (it is light, it is like the tree of life and the waters of life, it cannot be exercised without love and humility, and it is intimately bound up in the quality of our relations with/to others), I am more and more interested in borrowing the term "capability" or "capacity" from various recent thinkers. More on this later . . .

[Reply](#)

4.



Adam S. Miller July 15, 2009 at 11:48 AM

Brandie,

Given my fumbling with the verses, I appreciate your kind words.

Also, I'll be interested to hear what you have in mind with the terms "capability" or "capacity." Which thinkers are you thinking about here?

[Reply](#)

5.



Shon Hopkin July 16, 2009 at 6:38 PM

Your insights (and those of Levinas) on seeing/being seen are very stimulating. You said: "In the other person's absence it is not so difficult to pretend that we "know" them, have taken their measure, and have a handle on who they are. But, brought face to face with the other, this pretension evaporates.

Why? Because when we come face to face with the other, it is no longer the case that we are simply seeing them. Rather, face to face, we see them and we see ourselves being seen. Face to face, we find ourselves gripped by their inaccessible gaze. We discover that there is another perspective from which the world unfolds and that, in fact, we are not (as we pretend) the center of the universe."

It occurs to me that this "de-centering" effect of being seen by another is exactly what makes the unity Christ desired in John 17 so challenging and so rewarding. A constant state of true unity with God and with his disciples is something that requires immense faith as we learn to truly open ourselves to the view of God and others and give way our prized sense that we are the center of the universe, in order to enjoy the greater blessings of true charity. The marriage setting, the family setting, the church/ward setting, and the setting of deep friendships all teach that we must lose ourselves in order to be found.

Your insights on the de-centering effect of being seen also helped me better understand why Moses would declare, after seeing God, "Now for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed" (Moses 1:10). What could more strongly convince us that we are not the center of the universe than to be confronted by the image of God, who is the center of the universe?

In a similar way, it may be that only because they have knowledge that Christ's image is engraven in their countenances will the redeemed be able to rejoice in God's presence for all eternity. Without His image engraven there and His name written upon their foreheads, the constant presence of God (seeing them as they truly are) would be too unsettling and even terrifying. It would be easier for such to retreat back into the comfortable darkness of alone-ness than to be where God and the Saints are dwelling in the unceasing, revealing light of unity, seeing each other and being seen.

Reply

6.



Adam S. Miller July 17, 2009 at 7:28 AM

Shon says:

"What could more strongly convince us that we are not the center of the universe than to be confronted by the image of God, who is the center of the universe?"

Consider this an additional speculation rather than a critique or correction, but I wonder if it might not be just as true of God (as it is of us) that in order to be found, he must be lost.

If so, then God himself would be God only by virtue of having *perfected* the work of *de-centering* himself such that, in order to be God, he would *never* be at the center of the universe.

Or, to borrow from your reference to Moses 1:10, might it be that God is God precisely because he is *himself* perfectly aware of his own nothingness? If kenotic self-abandonment is the essence of love and salvation, then should we posit God's perfection as an exception to "nothingness"?

I'm reluctant to say so. We may very well want to posit him as the perfection of this salvific "nothingness."

Just thinking out loud.

[Reply](#)

7.



[Brandie Siegfried](#) July 17, 2009 at 2:27 PM

Thanks, all, for such great comments.

Adam, with respect to "capability" and "capacities," I'm thinking of Ricoeur's reading of Agamben (especially in *The Course of Recognition*, but also hypothesizing from *Oneself as Another*), Richard Kearney's readings of Ricoeur, W. Scheuerman (various articles pertaining to law), and D. Dyzenhaus (on capacity in relation to legitimacy).

Some further thoughts: if imagining oneself as being the center of the universe is childish even for God, we might still wish to preserve "being centered" as something else entirely, as something still desirable. Or, at least, being willing to put oneself in the center of things (as in multiple relationships requiring a certain kind of sophistication -- making oneself a kind of hub, tying otherwise conflicting perspectives together to make rolling forward possible). Where Levinas goes for triangulation, I might go for encircling, and a certain brand of appropriate centering.

[Reply](#)

8.



[Adam S. Miller](#) July 18, 2009 at 8:32 AM

Brandie,

I'm familiar with Ricoeur and even more so with Agamben (especially his beautiful little book on Walter Benjamin and St Paul), but I'm not familiar with any of Ricoeur's work on Agamben. Kearney, of course, I also know but I'm completely unfamiliar with Scheuerman and Dyzenhaus. All of it, though, piques my interest in what you'll have to say.

As for "being centered": the image would be of God as a kind of network hub that forms alliances, ties disparate and far flung pieces together, and makes "translation" between all kinds of otherwise incompatible "operating systems" possible? If so, I kind of like it. Especially insofar as, functioning as a kind of network hub or widely available mediator, God would still "vanish" in his role of making connections (i.e., none of the connections he makes are actually about *him*). Though as Mormons (lacking a doctrine of creation ex nihilo) I think we could allow for all kinds of relationships between things in the universe to be routed through mediations that don't require God to be one of the participants

The encircling image, though, makes me think (perhaps unavoidably) of the famous Round Table which distributes relationships "equally" around an "empty" center.

Just more thinking out loud.

Reply

9.



Brandie Siegfried July 21, 2009 at 2:25 PM

Adam,

I love the Round Table image -- I may have to steal that. I especially like the theological implications: we God's children, but we are also meant to become God's friends and companions-at-arms. Here, "arms" would mean doing/creating/rescuing righteousness, in holiness, with a joyful purpose. I'll have to think about this a bit more.

Revelation 22:8-11

*8*And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. *9*Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God. *10*And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. *11*He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.

EXEGESIS

Because our examination has divided the text into manageable units that sometimes differ from other ways of dividing and outlining the text, I thought that it would be useful to first place this pericope (22:8-11), and some of the material treated by Adam in a slightly different framework in order to see its literary context perhaps a bit better, as well as allow us to make a few generic considerations.

Most divisions of Revelation see its final section or Epilogue as comprising 22:6-21. In a sense this final section revisits the kind of direct revelation to John in the Introduction (1:1-3) and the specific, individual direction to his readers that characterized the Letters to the Seven Churches (1:4-3:22). Indeed, there is a great deal of verbal resonance between the opening and closing sections of the apocalypse, and generically they form an epistolary frame for the whole work. Thus rather than just a series of symbolic visions as in the body of the apocalypse, here John is given specific instructions which he is implicitly instructed to write down and disseminate, as is suggested by the discussion of not sealing the prophecy (22:10) and repeated references throughout the Epilogue to the "book" and the "book of this prophecy."

While John's guide up to this point has been an angel, who was introduced in 21:9, his speaking the words of Christ creates a similar ambiguity to that which confronted John, and the readers, in 19:9-10. Indeed, while the angel is still technically the interlocutor in this passage, by the time we look at the material that Brandie will be treating this week (22:12-17), the speaker is unambiguously the risen Christ, "the Alpha and Omega." In this passage, the fact that it is an angel, rather than Jesus, who seems to be speaking makes little difference: the servants of God bear his name and speak his words.

In terms of the internal structure of the Epilogue, G.K. Beale sees it as consisting of five exhortations to holiness (vv. 6-7, 8-10, 11-12, 13-17, and 18-20) followed by a single verse conclusion (v. 21). While many other divisions of the epilogue have been advanced, and while most agree that there is no explicit flow of thought, the idea that it comprises as final exhortation for God's people to manifest "holy obedience" so that they can become heirs to the heavenly Jerusalem and the new earth that was the subject of the last vision seems clear. A repetition in 22:10 of the earlier idea that the time is at hand (see 1:3) adds to the sense of urgency that believers, whenever they may be living, must respond to the message of Revelation.

Notes

I John saw these things, and heard them. Here the emphasis on senses, seeing and hearing, is again prominent. The visions of John were an actual experience, and since the overarching message is of the person and work of the Risen Lord, there is a certain resonance with the opening testimony of 1 John 1:1: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life."

I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. The reasons for John's act here are somewhat more clear than in a similar moment in 19:9-10. At least here, in a vivid example of Talmage-esque "divine investiture of authority," the angel has just quoted, in first person, the words of Jesus: "Behold, I come quickly . . ." (22:7). Accordingly it is possible that John actually confused the angel with the person whose words he was quoting. Commentators, however, tend to focus more on the disorienting effect the fantastic visions have had on John.

Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not . . . worship God. Because of the emphasis on idolatry throughout the book, some have suggested that the angel's rebuke of John is a final message that none besides God alone, or perhaps Christ with God, are worthy of veneration or worship (See Beale, 1128).

I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book. Paralleling 19:10, the prophets here may well be those who have the testimony of Jesus, since "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." If one accepts that the revelation of Revelation is the unveiling of the risen, glorified Christ, those who keep the saying of this book are those who know Jesus for who he really is, who testify of that, and who are his at his coming.

Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book. Here a clear echo to the end of another apocalyptic book (or more correctly the ending of the apocalyptic section of a book) can be seen by comparing it to Daniel 12:4, where Daniel was commanded to seal up his book until the end. A similar injunction to seal something up was seen in the direction to seal the voice of the seven thunders in 10:4, but overall the thrust of 5:1-11:18, and by extension that of the whole book, has been to unveil and unseal.

For the time is at hand. A purely futurist interpretation of Revelation robs this expression of all sense. Clearly the time for the final wrapping up scene was not at hand at the time that John wrote Revelation, but an eclectic approach (and especially progressive dispensationalism) allows it to have meaning to readers in every age.

He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. This verse (really part of the third exhortation according to Beale's schema) is difficult grammatically, because the exhortations are, in Greek, actually imperatives and aorist imperatives at that. The aspect of the tense gives the sense not of continuing action but of instantly begun action or accomplished state (although this is tempered in each instance by the adverb *eti*, which is difficult to take as anything but "still" or "yet" although "further," meaning more than before, might work). A grammatical answer to this is that these imperatives may actually be what Wallace calls "conditional imperatives" (pp. 489-91)

The question, then, is whether this applies to a post-judgment state or, if the passage applies in every age.

EXPOSITION

Passing reference above to the standard LDS idea of "divine investiture of authority," has bearing on Latter-day Saint responses to verses 8-9, since an angel or prophet can in fact speak the very words of God or Christ as if he were the very deity acting or speaking. While this passage, and its parallel in 19:10, might serve as examples of the actual practice of such representational authority, members of our community might be well served by learning from the rebuke to John when he confused the message (and its originator) with the messenger: while we may respect, sustain, and even honor prophets and leaders, only God alone deserves worship of any kind.

The concept of sealed books, while here clearly resonant with Daniel, is important in other restoration scripture, especially the Book of Mormon. In fact the direction given to Nephi in 1 Nephi 14 (and presumably similar direction given to Mahonri Morinancumer and Moroni in regard to material associated with Ether) privileges the very text of John now under discussion.

Since Book of Mormon scripture and some of its concepts presumably were not available to John, parallels with that book are properly the realm of exposition not exegesis. Still, the idea of no unclean thing being able to enter the kingdom of God and a place being prepared for those who remain filthy (see 1 Nephi 15:33-34, 2 Nephi 9:16, Alma 7:21, etc.) illustrate an important doctrinal point suggested by 22:11. Especially if the imperatives of 22:11 are in fact conditional, readers are presented with a choice to be filthy or righteous. As the Lord, through his angel to John, exhorted his people to holiness, he was in fact applying the drama of the visions of Revelation to them: they could be with the Great Whore or the Living Christ.

3 comments:



Kevin Barney July 23, 2009 at 7:08 PM

Talmagian divine investiture of authority gets abused a lot by my blogging friends, who like to jokingly toss it around as the deus ex machina that solves all theological dilemmas. But it is a real concept, as these Revelation passages demonstrate.

And I find the instruction *not* to seal the book fascinating, and a vivid demonstration of the immediacy of the results of the prophecy.

Reply



Julie M. Smith July 26, 2009 at 5:58 PM

What a fascinating post. Thank you.

A few random comments:

(1) I am struck by the chiasmic repetition of saw/heard/heard/seen in v8. I wonder what purpose it might serve?

(2) V8-9 is quite similar to 1 Nephi 17:55. What does this teach us about Nephi/the angel and John/Nephi's brothers?

Reply



Adam S. Miller July 27, 2009 at 12:42 PM

Thanks, Eric, for your work on these verses. It was worth the wait.

Regarding verses 8-9:

"And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God."

I'm reminding of the way that Jesus himself displaces worship from himself to the father. One could certainly imagine Jesus saying exactly the same thing the angel does were someone to attempt to worship him.

Apropos of our discussion last week about divine decentering, I wonder if this deferral/displacement may not itself be a mark of divinity.

If one were to bow down at the feet of the Father himself, would he defer or displace or deflect it? Would he direct us instead to the Son? Or to the Spirit? Or to Heavenly Mother? Such that the perichoresis of the Godhead would itself be orchestrated by precisely this kind of displacement from one person to the next to the next and back around again?

I wonder.

Revelation 22: 12-17

12 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. 13 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. 14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. 15 For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. 16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. 17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is a-thirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

Commentary

Verse 12: Stresses the immediacy of consequences or "reward" in relation to "work" or deeds. I like the exclamatory "See" of the NRSV. For a modern audience, it better links the idea of coming-to-awareness (looking and understanding) with the forms of expression (words, writing, etc) that the alphabetical analogy in the next verse invokes. It's a link by which personal rewards find their meaning (as holiness) when they are folded into relation.

Verse 13: "Alpha and Omega" brings the immediacy of consequences into the divine order. It also repeats the thematic connection developed throughout the book, linking letters (the rudiments of expression and history, the parts of speech by which words/worlds are made) to divine temporal and spacial orders or sets (beginning and end, first and last).

Verse 14: In the KJV rendering, blessedness is the consequence of mindful enactment of the law (those who "do his commandments") which as Leviticus teaches, culminates in the conditions of freedom (I discuss this in more detail below). This blessedness – this mindful extension of freedom – underscores the right to the tree of life, and grants passage into the New Jerusalem.

The NRSV, relying on different authority, begins the verse with "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life . . ." This alternative suggests a cleansing, a renewal -- entering the city and eating the fruit of the tree of life is no casual event, but highly ceremonial. Acknowledging the many ways we might read the ordinance of baptism onto this verse, I instead take a different but related turn. In fact, I'd like to wind the KJV and NRSV together via the ideal of jubilee outlined in Leviticus.

By way of prelude, let's begin with the ten commandments: Israel is invited to be free by means of a divine law without which, and left to themselves, would result in their falling back to the habit of slavery. Herbert McCabe has called the Mosaic law the "charter of liberation," beginning with God explaining, "I have brought you out of slavery . . ." and following with the manner by which to avoid various modes of future enslavement (modes far more subtle and common and easy than their experience under the Egyptians, and therefore more dangerous and immediately destructive).

Similarly, in his first recorded sermon, Jesus quotes Isaiah (who quoted Leviticus), saying that he has come to "proclaim release to the captives . . . , to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." He is referring to the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25: 8-55) when debts are forgiven, slaves released, and everyone begins anew in freedom. It was an ideal that stood as the antithesis of worldly cities where entire social, economic, and political systems (and for John, think Rome) rested upon domination of the poor by the rich, the weak by the strong, the humble by those who set themselves up as gods. I am always taken aback (being a child of U.S. capitalism) at just how delightfully radical the concept of jubilee is. But more importantly for my point here is that it was also called the day of Atonement, an extended sabbath for the people, and the land, and "unto the Lord."

In short, we might read the KJV's "do his commandments" as synonymous with the NRSV's "wash their robes" -- both are forms of ceremonial readiness for the New Jerusalem, for preparing for the sabbath, for the jubilation of atonement,

and the celebration of God's liberation.

Verse 15: Those that restrict true freedom are "without" the city -- in English, there is the double possibility of meaning both "outside the parameters of" and also "without benefit of" the freedoms offered by the city. The English translation suggests that there are, on the one hand, those who intentionally seek to limit the forms of divine freedom God has offered to humanity. Yet on the other hand, there seem to be those who are stymied by the paradox of ignorance: preparatory knowledge is required to enter the city, but the knowledge required is contingent on obedience to the laws of which these actors stand without benefit. The latter sense makes the invitation in verse 17 particularly poignant.

Verse 16: Jesus ratifies the symbolic iterations of the angelic messenger. The elision between "to you" and "in the churches" (KJV) makes explicit the public orientation of the prophetic/visionary content – this is not a private revelation, but revelatory poetics meant to provoke and inspire the community of the saints. Having repeated the theme of word/world, Jesus winds around it another theme that has been prominent throughout Revelation, that of the "root." Somehow, the architecture of the city is bound up with a specific orientation towards his role as creator: he is not merely the manufacturer of things (objects), but the "root" of ancestry, and the city is to be conceived of in these terms.

Jesus is also the "offspring," and if we want to link this to Adam's point about divine deferral, we might take this to mean that while he typifies Divine power, that power is re-typified when others follow the law (and again, I am using law in the sense of actions that create the conditions for freedom and holiness). Being both root (tree) and offspring (fruit), Jesus anchors the actual world and its history to the transforming potential of holy capabilities. As D. Tutu and others have suggested, the miracle of repentance and forgiveness is that they transform the past. The facts of the past don't change, but the meaning of the past – its formative effects in the lives of real people – does.

Verse 17: Spirit and Bride give a welcoming greeting; those that listen and seek and desire are singled out and especially welcomed. Freedom is again stressed, even celebrated, as the appropriate mode for dipping into the water of life. Of special note: the musicality of this verse creates a beautiful swelling of welcome – it begins with the duet of "Come!" by the Spirit and the Bride, and it gathers power as a chorus of "everyone who hears" sings "Come." And then, in a significant shift, the "let everyone who is thirsty come" – now heard as the dynamic harmony of Spirit, Bride, and Hearers – crescendos with the final line, "Let anyone who wishes, take the water of life as a gift." A gift. The city, the tree of life, the fruits of holiness, words and worlds, the water of life – all, a gift. This is why I hear the echoes of the year of jubilee throughout Revelation.

Posted by **Brandie Siegfried** at **9:39 PM**

2 comments:



Kevin Barney July 30, 2009 at 10:20 AM

I love the "wash their robes" reading in v. 14. That is rich with symbolism from an LDS perspective.

Reply



Julie M. Smith August 2, 2009 at 4:11 PM

Thank you for this post. I particularly like the links that you make to Leviticus. If I think about Leviticus while reading this passage, I am struck by the phrase "and may enter in through the gates into the city" because so much of Leviticus concerns who is worthy to enter in to which part of the temple at what time. And here the invitation is extended not just to the ritually pure and not just to the Israelite and not just the priest or the high priest, but to all people who choose to keep the commandments.

Revelation 22:18-21

Text:

18. For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: 19. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and [from] the things which are written in this book. 20. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. 21. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with you all. Amen.

Comments:

Probably every Mormon missionary who has served within spitting distance of the Bible belt has heard this passage quoted as an argument against the Book of Mormon, to the effect that obviously there can be no more scripture after the Bible (for such would "add to" the Bible impermissibly). That argument of course is based on the presentist premise that "this book" is the Bible as a whole. In reality, of course, "this book" is a specific reference to the book of Revelation; the Bible as we know it today did not yet exist as such and would not exist in its present form for some centuries from the time those words were written.

But let's go ahead and correct the argument and restrict "this book" to Revelation. What does this say about the revisions of the JST? What about modern textual critics who make decisions about which words belong in the text and which do not? What about translators who make decisions about how the words and thought of the Apocalypse should be represented in another language? What about commentators? Indeed, what about this Mormon Theology Seminar itself? Have we been in violation of the curse formula for attempting to plumb the depths of what the author was trying to say in these chapters?

In an ancient legal setting that lacked the intellectual property protections of modern copyright law, such curse formulas and their appeals to the gods and divine retribution for meddling with one's text were a common literary device. We see a similar example from the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 4:2:

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish [ought] from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

This ancient custom may perhaps be seen most clearly in the Letter of Aristeas 310-11, which describes a decision made when the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) was completed:

310 After the books had been read, the priests and the elders of the translators and the Jewish community and the leaders of the people stood up and said, that since so excellent and sacred and accurate a translation had been made, it was only right that it should remain as it was and no 311 alteration should be made in it. And when the whole company expressed their approval, they bade them pronounce a curse in accordance with their custom upon any one who should make any alteration either by adding anything or changing in any way whatever any of the words which had been written or making any omission. This was a very wise precaution to ensure that the book might be preserved for all the future time unchanged.

In the first instance, this warning was not addressed to future scribes, translators or commentators, but to those members of the seven churches to whom the book was directed, "to everyone who hears" the words of the book. (Note that the KJV's use of "man" in these verses should be translated in a gender neutral fashion.) We tend to imagine that in antiquity people had their own copy of the scriptures and read them personally the way you and I do today. But no, most people experienced the scriptures by hearing them read vocally in groups, and doubtless that is the way the words of this book would have first been experienced by those first hearers. Of course, the curse formula may also be read more broadly as applying to any (including future) attempt to wilfully distort the message of the book. So in my view, those who have attempted to establish the text, to translate that text, and to comment on the text in an effort to understand it correctly (including, yes, the JST) are not guilty of violating the curse formula.

In my opening salvo in this blog series, I pointed out that some scholars are of the view that the contents of our chapters originally appeared in a different order and have been somewhat scrambled. These scholars consider these curse formula verses to be a later addition to the text. The late David Noel Freedman, editor in chief of the Anchor Bible series, commented wryly in correspondence to the author of the Revelation volume in that series on the extreme irony that the curse formula prohibiting additions to the text was (if those scholars are correct) itself just such an addition to the text!

We Mormons are big on testimony and this passage is framed as such a witness. The antecedent to the pronoun I in "I testify" that begins our passage is Jesus (from v. 16 "I Jesus"), and so it is the Savior himself who is saying these words.

One of the joys of reading the text in Greek is being able to see how words are used and how over time many of those words have come into our language. For instance, the "I testify" we have just described is *marturō egō*. The verb has come into English as the word "martyr," one who suffers death for her unwillingness to recant her witness, and the pronoun *egō* "I" has come into English as the word "ego." The "plagues" mentioned later in the verse are an English derivative of the Greek word used here, *plēgas*. For anyone who enjoys words, this is a fun exercise to trace the English derivatives and cognates of the Greek, and to me it sort of helps to make the text come alive.

There is an important textual variant in v. 19. The reference there to the "book of life" should be to the "tree of life." I am going to focus on this variant in my presentation at our in-person conference in Austin, Texas on September 25th; the title of my paper will be "A Book or a Tree? The Erasmus Variant in Revelation 22:19." So I won't say more on that subject here; if you are intrigued by the difference between a book of life and a tree of life in this passage, then by all means please come to the conference.

The KJV wording of the last two verses reflects some elaborations in the text that accrued over time. The original likely was simpler, something as follows (NRSV):

20. The one who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.'

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

21. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.*

I was particularly intrigued by the "Come, Lord Jesus!" This appears to be a translation of the Aramaic expression found in 1 Cor. 16:22, which is transliterated through Greek into English as a single word, *maranatha*. In Aramaic, this is two words, although precisely how they should be divided is somewhat uncertain: either *maran atha* or *marana tha*.

The *mar* means "lord," the *-an* or *-ana* is the first person plural pronominal suffix meaning "our," and the *tha* or *atha* is some form of the verb meaning "to come," usually taken as a perfect "Our Lord has come!" or, as here, as an imperative "Our Lord, come!" This Aramaic expression appears to have been in common use among early Christians.

Thus endeth the formal blog commentary (although comments will continue to be posted). I'll look forward to seeing many of you in Austin come September 25!

Posted by [Kevin Barney](#) at 7:26 AM

3 comments:



Eric D. Huntsman August 1, 2009 at 9:59 AM

Kevin has handled 22:18-19 so well, that there is scarcely much need to add to what he has written. As additional clarification, however, in regard to "not adding" to the words, I would point out exegetically that the Greek text clearly states that the Lord is talking about *tous logous tēs propheteias tou bibliou toutou* (the words of the prophecy of this book). Hence it is not just that those who tamper with the book are under a curse, but rather those who take away or add to the "prophecy" (singular) of the book. While many may see this as a collective, referring to all the prophecies and visions as a set, my approach is to see it as specifically referring to the testimony of Jesus (cf. 19:10) that the visions enunciate, namely the "unveiling" of Jesus in his

true identity as glorified Lord and the one who unlocks and guides the course of history.

As Kevin has pointed out, “this book” (tou bibliou) must refer to the book of Revelation itself. I am not the apologetic sort, but for those who still find themselves forced to counter evangelical arguments about not adding to the canon, one simply needs to recall that “Bible” (ta biblia) is a neuter plural, literally “books,” and that this collection of books postdates Revelation by at least a century and a half. Only much later did a feminine singular, hē biblia, develop once the Bible was thought of as a book and not a collection of books.

But I want to share a final thought regarding the possible expositional significance of “not adding” to the prophecy of this book in particular and indeed to all scriptural books in general. Textual and redaction criticism on the one hand and prophetic revision, expansion, and correction à la the JST on the other witness the potential fluidity of the text. What is significant to me is that the meaning of the text when it comes to the testimony of Jesus, rather than the actual collocation of words in surviving or revised texts is what is important . . . and that is because a correct knowledge and appreciation for the identity, nature, and majesty of Christ, the God of Israel and the whole earth (see 3 Nephi 11:14 comes first and finally through revelation: he must unveil himself to each of us, at first through the spirit and then (hopefully) in actual fact. This is the testimony of the Book of Revelation that I see and, indeed, that I have received.

Reply

2.



Eric D. Huntsman August 1, 2009 at 10:06 AM

I would like to share as one of my final posts something a bit more devotional in nature. It is the text of a beautiful musical setting “E’en So Lord Jesus Quickly Come,” by Paul Manz. Its lyrics allude to several passages from Revelation, including 1:4-5, 4:8, 12:12, 22:20, 21:22-23. Wish there were a way to upload an *.mp3 file to the blog, because Ron Staheli and the BYU University Singers have performed this masterfully.

Peace be to you and grace from Him,
Who freed us from our sin,
Who loved us all, and shed his blood ,
That we might saved be.

Sing holy, holy to our Lord ,
The Lord almighty God ,
Who was and is, and is to come ,
Sing holy, holy Lord.

Rejoice in heaven, all ye that dwell therein,
Rejoice on earth, ye saints below
For Christ is coming, is coming soon,
For Christ is coming soon.

E'en so Lord Jesus quickly come,
And night shall be no more,
They need no light, no lamp, nor sun,
For Christ will be their All!

Now THAT is the message of Revelation!

Reply

3.



Julie M. Smith August 2, 2009 at 4:28 PM

Fabulous post, thanks.

Some thoughts:

--v18: "every man that heareth" As you point out, we have already violated the expectations of the text by reading it instead of hearing it. I wonder what we are missing by doing that.

--I really appreciated the questions you pose in your second paragraph of comments.