

The Compass

Week 52

OT Readings: Zechariah 6:1- Malachi 4:6

NT Readings: Revelation 15:1-22:21

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- **Malachi** is the final book in our OT.¹ The prophet speaks to those who have returned from exile.

New Testament

- With Revelation's conclusion, the NT canon is closed and God's written revelation comes to an end.²

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

Revelation 21-22. Is there any meaning to history? Is it going anywhere? How am I to make sense of my life in the complexity of the world in which we live? We all have that question, whether we have articulated it or not. The Bible says "Yes!" to meaning.

Here we are given a picture of the conclusion of all things.³ These two chapters are loaded with images and allusions to words spoken and events that took place earlier in the Grand Story that is the Bible: Jerusalem the holy city, the Lamb, the bride, the temple, the tree of life and so on. It is as if we are to understand that *all* things will come together and *all* things will be made right and *all* things will make sense. God will tie up the loose ends and it will *all* be O.K. What could be more assuring?!

Central to this vision of completion is the One on the throne, the Alpha and Omega, the One who gives the water of life; the One whom we will see face to face, at last! All of the twists and turns of history along the way, all of the tragedy and broken heartedness (for God most of all) are over and GOD is able to conclude it in such a way that it makes sense and is made right.

Yet, remarkably it seems that this end is really only a beginning. The new heaven and new earth are a remake of Eden, where all that God dreamed for His people begins again! And this is our future because of the kind of God we love and serve; this future reality should colorize our black and white existence in the present precisely because of Who He is.⁴

Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

Revelation 21:1-5. What a picture! The "loud shout from the throne" declares God's intention to be with His people, once and for all time, and what that will mean.⁵ John sees the end of the story and it is truly wonderful; at the end of it all there is a newness and transformation that rights things and brings to God's people a fullness of healing and renewal beyond all of our hopes and expectations.⁶

Yet 21:5 is interesting and almost seems out of place. God Himself now speaks and shifts focus from the future to come to the present moment, saying, "Look, I **am making** everything new!"⁷ What is to be in the future begins now in the present – God's "newness" is on the loose! Our hope of renewal, of healing and wholeness does not await the conclusion of things but is present in the now because our healing and transforming God is present with us **now**.⁸ Remember that these words in Revelation 21:5 were spoken in the 1st century. So, from that time until now, God has been at work to make old things new (2 Cor. 5:17).

This means, I believe, two practical things for us. First, we do life in the present in the hope of a final utter and complete transformation and healing because we believe that God will not leave anything undone. Second, we live in the present as though the future has already come, because Jesus death and resurrection are made real to us *now* by the Spirit's presence and power in and through our lives. The future hope lives in us and flows out through us to transform a lost and dying world. This present transformation is not perfect, of course, that awaits the conclusion; but it is real, authentic and powerful.

Let's ask God for His presence and power in increasing measure. Let's walk in obedience in such a way that He can trust us with His power and let's bear witness to His loving transformation to those around us – He is **right now**

making all things new! Let's ask Him for a new revelation, a fresh and invigorating vision for our lives and our world – one that will grip us and compel us forward, fearless and filled with His love.

Difficult Question of the Week

Mal 1:1-5. Q. "Is God arbitrary in how He deals with people, loving some and rejecting others?"

The NASU translates in 1:2-3, "...I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau..." The distinct impression is left that God arbitrarily chooses some individuals to "love" and others to "hate." However, what is clear from the context is that God is not speaking about the individuals of Jacob and Esau, rather about the nations or peoples that became their descendants (1:4 – "Esau's descendants in Edom"). If this text is about nations then how are we to understand the "love/hate (reject = NLT)" language and its meaning? In this context, love/hate refers to the idea of God's choice to work through Jacob's descendants and not Esau's in terms of God's historical/salvation purposes. It is not personal for God, He loved both of the twins, Jacob and Esau, equally, but there could be only one line of descent to create the nation of Israel.⁹

But did God "love" Israel more than other peoples and nations of the world? No, rather, His covenantal love for Israel, His choice of them, was for the express *purpose* of reaching the rest of the world. Where Israel failed in her role to reveal God to the world, Israel's Messiah-King Jesus and His new people of God will succeed.¹⁰

That God treats not only individuals equally, but peoples, is seen in various places in the OT. Remember Jonah! Also see Amos 1-2 where God holds both the nations and Judah to account based upon the same standard.¹¹

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¹ Malachi is the last prophet in the Book of the Twelve, the Minor Prophets. The Hebrew Bible concludes with Chronicles. With the OT conclusion we enter into the Intertestamental period which last roughly four hundred years until Jesus comes on the scene. This time period is rich with history *and* literature, much of it very important to understanding the NT. Notice Mal. 3:1 and 4:4-6 find their fulfillment in the coming of John the Baptist, Matt. 11:7-15, thus tying the OT and NT together.

² How did we come to have the Bible we have? Why were these books included and others not? These are questions dealt with in what is called "Biblical Introduction." See my resource list at [http://www.mikehuckins.com](#) for helps with these questions.

³ While the *meaning* of Revelation **must** be understood in its original context, this does not mean that none of Revelation is about the future. Yet, even in this passage, there are no dates; no "chart" will locate the specific timing or lead up of events - for this is not the purpose of this wonderful concluding picture! Again, if you press all the details looking for some literal fulfillment, you might miss the wonder of it. Is to be taken literally, i.e., an actual city, river, etc.? Perhaps, but the images are very tied with the OT. Can we not understand the power of the picture, especially with its OT allusions, and leave the exact details with God? Can we not feel the grandeur of it, feel the tug at our hearts as we are caught up into this future hope? Can we not say with them and the Spirit, "COME!" without trying to work out the exact measurements of the city, etc.? Like the whole of the Bible, this is about relationship, let's not miss the point.

⁴ The One who concludes all things is the same One at work with us in the present. Today matters, what we do in the present is important. Our future is not to be sitting on clouds in heaven strumming harps (uh – thankfully no), rather about the Creator God loosing us into adventures and tasks in a new creation that will both excite and engage us; the end is a beginning...

⁵ Revelation 21:3 reveals the magnificent fulfillment of God's longtime dream – to have a people to love and be loved by. The phrase, "...they will be His people and He Himself will be with them" is a repeated echo throughout the whole of the Bible.

⁶ I love John Eldredge's little book, *The Epic*. He captures the Biblical sense of the grand story and its conclusion. In his final chapters, he draws from other epic stories (Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*) to show how God will conclude *The Story*, "His-story," well. I highly recommend it!

⁷ "I am making" is a present tense verb in Greek, meaning *now and ongoing*.

⁸ This fits NT understanding (especially seen in Paul's writings) of the "already, but not yet" of God's (kingdom) work in the world. It has begun (21:5), but the completeness of God's "newness" awaits the conclusion of all things (21:1-4).

⁹ With twins in the womb of Rebekah (Isaac) and only able to follow one descendant line in terms of developing a nation, God chose (= "loved") Jacob.

¹⁰ This is part of the message of Romans 9-11; God has not failed in His historical purposes just because ethnic Israel did not believe in the Messiah. God is still at work and will take from among both Jew and Gentile those who believe and make them into one Messianic people of God.

¹¹ Also, again, Jer. 18:1-17 is the overarching principle of how God deals with nations in the OT, including His own people.