

No Sequel in Sight

The Last Words – Part III

Revelation 22:18-19

Introduction

Is the Bible that you hold in your hand missing anything? Is there a book missing? Is there a sequel needed to finish it? To ask this another way, is the Bible a finished book?

Writing to the church in Ephesus, Paul likened the church to a building, saying,

. . . you are the household of God,

having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,

in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord

(Ephesians 2:19-21)

In other words, the apostles and prophets built the foundation of the redeemed house, and then the foundation was completed with Jesus Christ as the corner stone.

The writer of Hebrews also prepared the church to understand that the Bible would be completed with the last word of the apostles as he wrote in chapter 1 that,

in these last days [the church age] God has spoken to us in [the person of] His Son . . . (Hebrews 1:2)

By revelation God spoke *to* the prophets and apostles, and by inspiration God spoke *through* them.ⁱ

In chapter 2 of Hebrews we are informed that the apostolic community would be the mouthpiece of Christ, delivering to the church the word of God in the last days.

Over the past nineteen centuries Jesus Christ has been building the superstructure of His church which is pictured as both a bride and a building. In other words, for the last 1,900 years we have not been waiting for another word from God to add to the foundation of the church. He clearly tells us that the provision of inspired scripture as the foundation of the church would be through the apostles.

The brief letter from the Apostle Jude, that appears just before the book of Revelation, points to the apostles of Jesus Christ as having delivered once for all the content of our faith and gospel.

This is why Paul so clearly defended his apostleship. Only the apostles had the right to deliver the final words of God's New Testament to the church.

John was the last living apostle and his revelation became the last, inspired, God-breathed scripture. This means that John is about to add the last block to the foundation of the church of which Jesus Christ alone is the corner stone!

Since Revelation describes the entire sweep of history from the close of the apostolic age to the eternal state of heaven and hell, any alteration or addition would be an alteration of scripture.ⁱⁱ

One New Testament Greek scholar put it this way:

[This book of Revelation] projects from John's lifetime all the way into the eternal state. So any type of prophetic utterance would intrude into the domain of this coverage and constitute an addition to or subtraction from Revelation's content. The final book of the Bible is also the concluding product of New Testament prophecy. It marks the close of the New Testament since the prophetic gift was the divinely chosen means for communicating the inspired books of the canon of scripture.ⁱⁱⁱ

John is about to deliver a warning, not only to would-be prophets, but for the church to refuse anything that challenges the divine authority, accuracy, and finality of this Book.^{iv}

How serious is this issue? How important is it to God that His word is now closed?

Let us find out as we pick up our study in Revelation chapter 22 by looking at verses 18-19.

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book;

and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

I would say this is pretty serious!

The last apostle writing the last book in the timeline of inspired scriptures says of this book – and effectively, by its placement in history as the last word from the last apostle – this Bible is closed. In other words, the Bible is an open book, but it is not an open-ended book.

This revelation of God clearly comes to an end with a warning label attached: “Don’t tamper with the text.”

This warning, by the way, is not against misunderstanding scripture – especially the book of Revelation. Aren’t you glad?!

John is not saying in these verses that if we study the book of Revelation and become a pretribulationist – one who believes the rapture is going to happen prior (pre) to the tribulation – we will get into heaven, but if we become a posttribulationist – one who believes the church is taken up after the tribulation – we are wrong and will not go to heaven. This is not what John is saying.

Posttribulationists who believe the gospel of Christ will go to heaven too. In fact, they are going to go earlier than they thought, and not one of them will be complaining.

John is not talking about misunderstanding prophetic timelines or verses of scripture by born again students of God’s word who love the gospel of Jesus Christ. He, and every other apostle, is warning about those who would purposefully distort the gospel – claiming to have a “new word from God,” which effectively restructures the gospel and redefines the words of scripture.

This is like Joseph Smith who claimed to be a prophet with another Testament of Christ which denies the singular embodiment of deity in Christ. It also claims that God was once a man and that every man can one day become a god. This restructures the gospel and redefines biblical terms.

Add to this Mohammed’s Koran which states that Jesus did not die on the cross, but Judas died while Jesus was taken up into heaven. It also claims that Christ was nothing more or less than a prophet of God; that He was not God in the flesh – equal with the Father and deserving of our worship.

Islam and Mormonism are two examples out of dozens that try to align themselves with scripture, but

are forced to redefine and reorient its clear meaning and thus become another gospel.

Included in this list are Mary Baker Eddy, the Bhagavad Gita, the religious writings of Confucius, and the tenets of the Buddha which, by the way, had reached the Mediterranean around the same time as Paul began preaching the gospel of Christ.

This is why Paul warns in Galatians,

. . . if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Galatians 1:9)

In other words, when Paul was preaching the gospel of God who came in the flesh, died on a cross for the salvation of sinners and, in His resurrection, authenticated His exclusive claim as God the Son and the seed of David, there were already other gospels being preached.

So it is not surprising that when we come to the end of God’s revelation – literally the end of the “biblos,” the book, the Bible – we discover that the book of Revelation opens with a blessing for everyone who reads it, hears it, and keeps it, and ends with a warning and a curse for anyone who tampers with it.^v

John delivers two very clear warnings in verses 18 and 19. Let us look at these.

Warning against Addition

The first warning is against addition. Let us take a closer look at verse 18.

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book;

In other words, if we think the unbelievers had it bad on earth during the Tribulation, we will see that the plagues of that period were nothing compared to the horrors of hell and eternal suffering.

Obviously then, this is a heaven or hell issue.

John is saying that if we add to the text of God’s revealed word what we believe is equal to and additionally significant to God’s word, we will experience the tortures of hell.

What does John mean?

Looking at God’s revelation as a straight line, there are the opening lines from Moses in Genesis that lead to the Old Testament prophets and poets and then to Christ and His apostles who then deliver the truth that takes us to the end of the world. So we can imagine a straight line from the beginning of creation

in Genesis to the creation of a new heaven and earth in Revelation.

This means that God's word, from the first book to the last, encompasses all of time from beginning to end. So in the Bible we hold, we have God's completed revelation from the beginning of time to the end as we know it.

As a result, anyone who tries to insert themselves into the line of biblical prophets or poets or tries to attach themselves to the end of the line after the apostles and say, "I have something new," needs to be turned off and warned by the church. There is nothing missing in the Bible and there is no sequel to the Bible.

You may have noticed that we are surrounded by a proliferation of all kinds of cults and winds of doctrine which are sweeping the world. Most of these are based on someone's claim to be speaking for God and to have been given divine illumination and authority.^{vi}

Every one of these people that I have ever heard about or studied the works of briefly or at length never really deny the Bible or the existence of Jesus Christ. They redefine the Bible and the person of Christ, and then restructure the plain meaning of the text of the Bible. In so doing, they have to do one of two things: add to or take away from the Bible.

Adding to and subtracting from the revealed word of God brought about the downfall of mankind in the past and is still destroying lives today. It is the original deception. The fall of man in the Garden of Eden involved Eve adding to the words of God – "We can't even touch the tree" – and Satan subtracting from the words of God – "God didn't say that!"

This then is the warning: Do not tamper with the words of God! Do not tamper with the text! Do not rewrite the word! There is no sequel in sight!

Now, in our generation there has been an explosion of interest in other gospel accounts, supposedly, known as the Gnostic Gospels. People want to know why these books were left out of the Bible.

This is a great question. Why were the Gospel of Judas, the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Philip, the Gospel of Truth, and about forty-five more left out?

The Gnostic Gospels were written some time after the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were accepted by the believing community as genuinely written by apostles under the guidance of

the Holy Spirit of God. Many of these gospels were written in the third and fourth centuries and even up to the eighth century as obvious counterattacks to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The word "gnostic" comes from the Greek word "gnosis," which means "knowledge". The writers used the word to refer to hidden knowledge that was available only to the enlightened. The Gnostics believed they were in tune with special spiritual, mystical experiences with God's Spirit that gave them further revelation.^{vii}

The Gnostic gospels clearly preached another gospel. To start with, Jesus was not God incarnate and He was not born of a virgin; He was an interesting man who started a following.

One church leader by the name of Irenaeus wrote in AD 180 that the Gnostic Gospel of Judas was well known to him and that it was fictitious history. Even the casual reader would have questions about the Gospel of Judas because the hero turns out to be, not Jesus, but guess who? Judas.

The Gnostics believed that since flesh was evil, God could never become flesh without becoming evil. Thus, Christ could not be God in the flesh. Further, nearly all the Gnostic writings or gospels denied the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Much like Islam to this day, the Gnostics did not believe that it was Jesus who died on the cross, but a substitute. In fact, these secret gospels that are rejected by the church supposedly taught that Jesus married one of His female disciples, Mary Magdalene.

It is interesting to read the Gnostic quotes regarding Jesus' marriage. Not a single verse in all of the Gnostic gospels actually says that Jesus got married to Mary Magdalene. The Gospel of Philip, which comes the closest to claiming this, says that Jesus kissed her, taught her more carefully, and even loved her more than any of the other disciples.^{viii}

Of course, this is all that the world of skeptics needed in order to let their imaginations go wild and reach all sorts of conclusions that even these spurious gospels never clearly taught.

I like the way one evangelical scholar defined these skeptics and the conclusions they draw without evidence. He wrote, "If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it must be a camel in disguise. So, since there is no biblical evidence that Jesus was married, multiple biblical indications that He was not married, and no extra

biblical or historical texts confirming He was married, He must have been married incognito.”

Let me encourage you that you do not have to be an expert in Gnostic writings. Just compare what you see and hear on the History Channel, a great supporter of Gnosticism, Animal Planet, a determined proponent of atheistic evolutionism, the typical store magazine, and toss in best-selling books like *The Da Vinci Code* and the *Lost Symbol* by Dan Brown to the biblical gospels which were held in reverence by the early church and you will be able to see they are different gospels, contrary to the ones received and preached by the apostles.

Why are the Gnostic writings so popular today? The writers of *Time Magazine*, oddly enough, put their finger on the answer to this question when they wrote, “These writings [Gnostic Gospels] are feeding America’s ever-sharpening appetite for mystical spirituality.”^{xix}

In other words, our culture wants some sort of religious experience outside the restrictions of the Bible.

Another author said that there is a lot of interest today in these lost gospels, these secret books. Why? Because many people are simply looking for another way of being a Christian.^x

There are people who want to be a Christian without Christ.

Do these Gnostic gospels fit the spirit of our times or what?!

Erwin Lutzer recently wrote about hearing a pastor in Chicago telling his large congregation on Christmas Sunday, “What do we do with the account of the shepherds, stars, and wise men? Do we have to believe that these events happened? No, we do not have to. What matters is the spirit of Christmas.” Lutzer added, “The Gnostics would have loved that.”^{xi}

What are we to think about best-selling author Dan Brown and other similar authors, like the ones in the latest *U.S. News & World Report*, special 2010 edition entitled, “The Secrets of Christianity”?

What a title! Christianity has secrets?

We might say, “C’mon, everyone knows that Christians can’t keep secrets!”

Evidently we can. In fact, there are some major secrets we have evidently really needed to keep hidden.

One of the most damaging supposed secrets of Christianity has gained popularity in the last few

years. It is that the New Testament Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) were selected at the fourth century Council of Nicaea by church leaders who wanted to suppress the truth that Jesus was just a man and that after His death, His band of disciples were led by His closest disciple and widow Mary Magdalene.

That *would* be a disaster should it ever get out, right?

So, *The Da Vinci Code* states as fact that the Emperor Constantine commissioned and personally financed a new Bible in the fourth century which omitted the Gnostic gospels that revealed Christ was a mortal man with a wife named Mary Magdalene. It also states that Constantine called the bishops to come to this council where they voted to keep only the Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – that characterized Jesus as godlike, and that the council vote was a very close vote, a cliff hanger.

Now, what this secret means, of course, is that the doctrine of Christ’s deity was decided by the church, and even then it barely got a majority vote by the Council of Nicaea.

This also means that Christianity as we understand it from the scriptures is really a fourth century creation. It was made up by male chauvinists who voted into existence a religion they fabricated because they did not want a woman leading the church. And when they voted, it was a very close vote.

There is a kernel of truth in this supposed secret, but it is surrounded by a pack of lies.

Unfortunately Dan Brown began his *Da Vinci Code* book, which I read by the way, with a statement claiming that what he was writing was the truth. He, in fact, wrote some interesting fiction, but is a very poor church historian.

The Council of Nicaea never once brought up the issue of Gnostic writings. They never voted on which Gospels to include in the Bible. In fact, in all the historical records of this council, which were very thoroughly kept, there is not one word about which books were inspired and which books were not. They did not even discuss the canon of scripture.

The council of Nicaea collected 318 bishops to settle the issue of Christ’s deity in the year 325 AD. That part is the truth. However, they convened, not because they were confused about Christ’s deity, but because of the growing popularity of a man named Arius.

Arius was teaching that Christ was not fully God and that He had a created beginning. He was teaching that Christ was *like* God the Father, but not *equal* in divine essence with God the Father.

We can easily see that Arius would become the forerunner of many cults that persist to this day.

The Council of Nicaea condemned Arius as a heretic and created the Nicene Creed to defend biblical truth. It read in part, “Christ . . . is . . . very God of very God . . . being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.”

In other words, Christ was deity, equal to the God the Father, and the Creator of everything.

Now, was this something these 318 bishops came up with 250 years after the apostles wrote their inspired texts, or does the Nicene Creed sound somewhat familiar to Philippians chapter 2 where Paul the Apostle wrote,

. . . although He [Christ] existed in the form of God, [He] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped [held onto],

but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant and being made in the likeness of men.

(Philippians 2:6-7)

Does the idea that Christ is the creator by whom all things were made sound like the original idea of the Council of Nicaea or does it sound like Colossians chapter 1 where the apostle wrote,

[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (Colossians 1:15)

Wait! The use of the word “firstborn” indicates Christ had a beginning. The Greek word is “prototokos” (πρωτοτοκος), which means “before/above” and refers to His preexistence.^{xii}

Paul is saying that Christ is superior to and eternally existed before creation. This would have had to have been true in order for Paul’s next phrase to make any sense – which the Council of Nicaea wrote into their creed,

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible . . .

He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

(Colossians 1:16-17)

One more truth to note about this council is that when they voted, it was not, as Dan Brown said in *The Da Vinci Code*, a relatively close vote. What

actually happened was that out of 318 bishops, only two voted against it.^{xiii}

This is not exactly a cliff hanger. In the Baptist church a 316 to 2 vote would be considered unanimous – in fact, it would be considered miraculous!

Ladies and gentlemen, the Council of Nicaea did not decide that Christ was God in the flesh and then hide all the other gospels that proved otherwise as they promoted the four gospels that supported their decision. They simply put this into creedal form, defending what the apostles had already taught and what the church had already believed for the past 250 years.

What was this council facing? The same thing the church is facing today – the persistent attempts by the forces of hell and fallen humanity to add to the truth of scripture.

So John comes to the end of his revelation with a serious warning against addition.

He is saying, in other words, “Don’t add to this gospel. There is no new prophet to come and there is no sequel.”

Listen, dear flock, be careful if what you are reading is contrary to or in addition to the truth we have already, once for all received (Jude 1:3).

Do not be gullible; think critically. Be immediately alert to anyone who says they believe this book is the word of God but not that it is the *last* word from God.

In every generation there are new versions of the heresy of Arius that:

- Jesus Christ is not God in the flesh;
- Jesus Christ is not the final word;
- Jesus Christ is merely mortal, but given deity as an honor for faithful living;
- other prophets have equal standing with Jesus Christ;
- the apostles need new replacements today;
- revelation did not cease with the closing of the Bible;
- the church needs new blocks of truth added to the foundation of the prophets and apostles;
- Jesus Christ is not the only corner stone to this building of our faith, but there is someone after Him or someone who is yet to come.

So John gives a warning label against addition, which includes anyone claiming to be from God or claiming to be God – as the antichrist will claim during the Tribulation. He also gives a second warning.

Warning against Omission

We are, secondly, given a severe warning against omission. Look again at verse 19.

and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

John is not suggesting that we can lose our salvation. He is describing someone who will see his opportunity to eternal life taken away because of his unbelief.

We can pick up on the play on words in verses 18 and 19. The one who adds has added to him the plagues. The one who omits is omitted from enjoying life in heaven.^{xiv}

The tragedy of unbelief throughout history can be summarized by these two warnings.

The cults and “isms” of our world add to the scriptures and the liberal world of unbelievers take away from the scriptures.^{xv}

According to this text, both actions are regarded as those which determine a destiny apart from the glory of God and the beauty of heaven.

Listen to the warnings. We do not sit as editors and redactors who presume to change, rearrange, or edit out the words of scripture.

We do not sit in judgment upon the scriptures, the scriptures judge us.^{xvi}

The prophets and apostles delivered the word of God, and John, the last of these, writing the last record of them, closes the book as he adds the last block to the foundation of our faith.

Nothing more is to be added and nothing can be removed. To remove part of the foundation of scripture would eventually lead to the collapse of the whole.

The integrity of scripture is destroyed in either direction. Either God left something out that man needs to add or man takes something out that God put in. Either way, the integrity of God’s character and the sufficiency of scripture are destroyed.

This is why the warning of future judgment is given for either adding or omitting the sacred words of God. Both judgments are the same condemnation

described with two different effects. Those who do not heed the warning suffer the torments and plagues of hell and are barred from the city of God – the golden city of God’s eternal glory with its orchards of trees bearing the fruit of eternal life – all of this is forever beyond their grasp.

This is a greater condemnation than that of Adam and Eve who were exiled from the Garden of Eden and barred from the tree of Life. In their disobedience they added to the words of God and also denied the words of God, but Adam and Eve were redeemed. The first animal sacrifices took place by the hand of God Himself, and He clothed Adam and Eve in this act of atonement.

However, according to these two verses in Revelation there is a different ending. At the end of human history as we know it, no one who dies in their unbelief can have their eternal destiny somehow reversed. John informs us in chapter 20 that they will be judged and condemned.

The question is really rather clear, “Do you want to miss heaven and go to hell?”

If so, then after the last word of the last verse of this Bible, change the last period to a comma and say, “I’ve got some new revelation that you’re going to need to know,” or “I’m going to follow a new gospel that has come to light.”

Or, take a pair of scissors and cut away scripture, as the Jesus Seminar did that convened several years ago. Their stated purpose was to “change the way people think about Jesus”. They wanted “a Jesus who speaks to things that concern modern society like feminism, multiculturalism and political correctness.”^{xvii}

After studying the Gospels, the attendees of this seminar concluded that only about 18% of the words ascribed to Christ were actually spoken by Him. This means Christ never said 82% of them, so they cut them out.

This group met again later and dissected the Lord’s Prayer. They decided that the only words Jesus actually said in this prayer were the words, “Our Father”.

I am surprised they agreed on the word “Father”!

John delivers the warning clearly that one must play grammatical gymnastics to make the Bible mean something other than what it clearly means.

Do not tamper with the truth of God’s word. Do not be guilty of addition or omission.

One author put it this way with great clarity when he wrote,

It is all or nothing. We are not to add to God's word as though it is insufficient and we are not to take one word away from it as though it is irrelevant, unreliable, or unimportant. There is nothing new! There is nothing less! There is nothing else but the word of God as it is! The last word has been written. The full stop has been added. God has drawn a line at the bottom of the page and that is it. There will be no further disclosure from heaven; there will be no appendix.^{xviii}

I might add as well, there is no sequel in sight!

There are many liberals today and unbelieving skeptics who would say the Bible is a collection of books decided upon by leaders in the church hundreds of years after the apostles wrote their letters. This is another lie. Even if it is a best seller, it is still a lie.

The truth is that by the time Athanasius, a godly church leader, listed the 27 books in an Easter letter dated in the late fourth century, the church had already affirmed the same 27 books and had been calling them the New Testament for over one hundred years.

Two hundred years earlier, only eighty years after the death of John the Apostle, a church leader named Irenaeus wrote of the apostolic letters that had been circulating and affirmed by the local churches saying, "The church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, carefully preserves it. For the churches that have been planted in Germany do not believe or hand down anything differently nor do those of Spain, nor those in Gaul [France], nor those in Egypt, nor those in Libya, nor those which have been established in the central regions of the world . . . nor will any one of the rulers in the churches however highly gifted he may be in point of eloquence, teach doctrines different from these."

The church did not create the Bible, it recognized the Bible.

This is like a jeweler who discovers a diamond. He does not make it a diamond; he merely affirms what it already is.

For those of us who because our eyes have been opened by Christ recognize what this Book is and believe its doctrines and in its divine Author, we stand shoulder to shoulder with Christians down through the centuries who do not fear this last warning of John – we will not add or subtract. May this be the way we live, even now, to:

- delight in this Book;
- defer to its divine authority over our lives;
- defend its Author;
- discover its truths and promises;
- deliver to others its gospel;
- depend upon it for our strength and direction.

May we live so that this Book is indeed . . .

. . . a lamp to [our] feet and a light to [our] path. (Psalm 119:105)

A veteran pastor used to come to my Bible college and preach during our chapel every so often. He was known for beginning or ending his sermons with a poem on the Bible. This made a lasting mark on my spirit and I will close our study with the same.

*We've travelled together,
My Bible and I,
Through all kinds of weather,
With smile or with sigh!*

*In sorrow or sunshine,
In tempest or calm!
Thy friendship unchanging,
My lamp and my song.*

*We've travelled together,
My Bible and I,
When life has grown weary,
And death even nigh!*

*But all through the darkness
Of mist or of wrong,
I found here a solace,
A prayer and a song.*

*So now who shall part us,
My Bible and I?
Shall "isms" or "schisms"
Or "new lights" who try?*

*Ah, no, my dear Bible,
Exponent of light!
Thou sword of the spirit,
Put error to flight!*

*And still through life's journey,
Until my last sigh,
We'll travel together,
My Bible and I.*

ⁱ Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible (Moody Press, 1974), p. 12.

ⁱⁱ John MacArthur, Revelation: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 2000), p. 310.

ⁱⁱⁱ Robert L. Thomas, Revelation: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 1995), p. 517.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v John Phillips, Exploring Revelation (Loizeaux Brothers, 1991), p. 264.

^{vi} Henry M. Morris, The Revelation Record (Tyndale House, 1986), p. 485.

^{vii} Erwin Lutzer, Seven Reasons You Can Trust the Bible (Moody Publishers), p. 21.

^{viii} "Mysteries of Faith: Secrets of Christianity," U.S. News & World Report (2010 special ed.), p. 48.

^{ix} Ibid., p. 36.

^x Ibid., p. 24.

^{xi} Lutzer, p. 111.

^{xii} Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 567.

^{xiii} Ibid., p. 8.

^{xiv} Kendell H. Easley, Holman New Testament Commentary: Revelation (Holman, 1998), p. 424.

^{xv} Morris, p. 486.

^{xvi} George Eldon Ladd, A Commentary on the Revelation of John (Eerdmans, 1972), p. 296.

^{xvii} Lutzer, p. 114

^{xviii} Sam Gordon, Worthy is the Lamb: A Walk through Revelation (Ambassador, 2000), p. 454.