

# AND THERE WAS NO MORE SEA: A BRIEF REFLECTION ON APOCALYPSE 21:1

## E o Mar já não existe: uma breve reflexão sobre Apocalipse 21:1

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### ABSTRACT:

The “Sea” concept in Revelation 21: 1 is part of a theological discussion in how the sea is understood in this apocalyptic passage. Sometimes, the Hebrew language applies “sea” for different amounts of water and not necessarily in the traditional meaning of the word. The same happens in the NT specifically with the lake of Galilee. E. G. White also refers to this particularity using the word “separation.” The idealists, in the other hand, imply a merely symbolic sea usage. This article discusses three approaches on this issue: (1) The Sea-lake approach, (2) the Idealist view and (3) the separation approach.

KEYWORDS: FLOOD, SEA, LAKE, RIVER, SEA-LAKE, IDEALIST AND SEPARATION

### RESUMO:

O conceito de “mar” de Apocalipse 21: 1 é parte de uma discussão teológica em como o mar é entendida nesta passagem apocalíptica. Às vezes, a linguagem que ele t hebraico aplica “mar” para diferentes quantidades de água, e não necessariamente no sentido tradicional da palavra. O mesmo acontece no NT especificamente com o lago da Galiléia. E. G. White também se refere a esta particularidade de usar a palavra “separação”. Os idealistas, por outro lado, implica um uso meramente simbólico mar. Este artigo discute três abordagens sobre esta questão: (1) a abordagem do mar-lago, (2) a visão idealista e (3) a abordagem de separação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: INTERPRETAÇÃO BÍBLICA; IDEALISMO E SEPARAÇÃO; APOCALIPSE, ABORDAGEM LAGO-MAR

Many people love the Sea for different purposes... scuba diving, snorkeling, surfing, studying its biology, currents, wind board surf, swimming, sand castles, running on the wet sand, or just resting on the sea shore, hearing the waving waters, you name it... Thinking about the word “Sea” in the book of Revelation, one asked question now and then is why in chapter 21: 1 John pens there is no more sea in the New Earth? Would that declaration means there will not exist Seas at all? The literal translation for that Sea’ sentence from the Apocalypse is: “the sea is not any longer.”<sup>2</sup> In attempting a few possible propositions on this matter is necessary to examine other interrogatives as well: What was the meaning of “no more sea” for the Johannine mind in the

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<sup>2</sup> In the Alexandrinus Codex (400 d.C) it says “the sea was see no more”

first century A.D? Do this “Sea” expression from Revelation 21: 1 conceals an idealist understanding? Did the word “Seas” in Genesis 1: 10 comprehend different and limited water’s extension and location than after the Noachian Deluge cited in chapters 6-8? Is this Genesis Flood the cause of John sea’s declaration in 21: 1? One short study on this debriefing can help on this puzzling “Sea” reference from the Apocalypse of John.

## IN THE BEGINNING

In reading Genesis 1: 6, 7, there is a general description about the second day of Creation, in which God made a division of the waters above the firmament and the waters under it. As part of the third day of Creation, God made the dry land or Earth and gathered together the waters that He called “Seas” (1: 9, 10), or – יַמִּים - in Hebrew, a term occurring some 21 times in the Old Testament. In Genesis 1: 21 says that God created “great sea creatures...” - הַתַּיִתִּים. In this same verse, Moses narrates that God also created other sea and fresh water creatures too.

In the rest of the Old Testament narrative, various “Sea” expressions are used for its description. In ancient times, the Mediterranean Sea, for instance, was first known as: (1) “the great sea” (Numbers 34: 6; Joshua 1: 4; Ezekiel 47: 10); (2) “the western sea” (Deuteronomy 11: 24; 34: 2; Joel 2: 20) and (3) the “Sea of the Philistines” (Exodus 23:31). Other salt water masses, such as the Red Sea was called “the sea of weeds” (Exodus 10: 19; Numbers 14: 25; Deuteronomy 1: 1); and “the Salt Sea” (Deuteronomy 3: 17; Numbers 34: 3) is another title for the Dead Sea, which Romans also rendered as “Asphalt Lake.”<sup>3</sup> The “Sea of Galilee” phrase will be analyzed in the following section.

## “SEA, LAKE, RIVER AND WATERS” AND ITS BIBLICAL USAGE

It is important to recall that the Hebrew mind sometimes understood the concept “Sea” in a different manner other than the word is normally employed today. Certain water’s quantities secluded in one place were called “seas” even thou the amount and place where the liquid remained was not exactly implying the traditional sea meaning. This calling procedure is exemplified by the same Hebrew word for sea, which is יָם. This noun is found and applied through the Old Testament for different ways other than the traditional sea concept: (1) the Nile river (Nahum 3:8; Isaiah 19:5); (2) the Euphrates river (Jeremiah 51:36, 63); (3) the huge brass fountain placed in the courtyard of

<sup>3</sup> See “Asphaltites Lacus” in Strabo. *Geography*. Book XVI. Chapter 2. Section 42.43 in Thayer, Bill. [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Strabo/16B\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Strabo/16B*.html). Strabo is confusing the Lake Sirbonis which later brook into the Mediterranean.

Salomon's Temple called "the sea of brass" or the "molten sea (𐤀𐤍)" too (2 Kings 25:13; 1 Chronicles 18:8). At the same time, the Old Testament refers to the Lake of Galilee as "The Sea (𐤀𐤍) of Chinnereth" (Numbers 34: 11). Interestingly, the shape of this water area is similar to a "harp" where the word *Kinnereth* comes from. The two words in the New Testament for "Sea" are: (1) - θάλασσα - applied equally to the Lake of Galilee (Matthew 4: 18; Mark 1: 16; 7: 31 - λίμνη - lake of Galilee in Luke 5: 1) and, (2) - πέλαγος - depth or high, deep seas - (Acts 27:5). This previous biblical lake and even river words overlapping into the sea description for them is rather indicating how ancients viewed and interacted with these words for certain inland water areas or courses. On regards the nouns seas and waters in prophecy, these operate in a close connection (Daniel 7: 2; Revelation 13: 1; 17: 1-2, 8, 15; 16: 12). However, within the book of Revelation is necessary to respect when sea is literal and when is symbolic. For instance, no one would interpret the "sea and springs of water" from Apocalypse 14: 7 as being symbolic. With these things in mind, this article offers next, at least three approaches for "Sea" in Revelation 21: 1.

### THE "SEA-LAKES" APPROACH

The writings of Mrs. White denotes "Seas" scenery akin to a sea-lakes shape during the pre-Deluge orb of Genesis rather than vast and turmoil oceans. Speaking about "Seas" in the pre-Flood world, she refers to "[...] lovely lakes [...]" (WHITE, 1980, p. 44). This view could also suggest both an amount of salt water placed in limited world areas or –sea lakes- and, therefore the absence of engulfing oceans as it prevails in today's planet. The coverage and tranquility of these waters would be in contrast to the Aegean Sea John saw and at the same time in harmony with his sentence "sea is not any longer." This expression would also comprise the fact John saw a total different type of Sea in the New Earth. The sea-water scenery illustrated by Mrs. White would indicate a calm water panorama where "no fierce torrents [...] no engulfing oceans [...] no restless murmuring waves [...]" (WHITE, 1911, p. 33).

Elaborating from those previous thoughts, it is possible to consider the Genesis flood as the original mechanism in producing the actual restless and engulfing oceans, as they currently prevail.<sup>4</sup> During the Genesis Deluge process, as the water covered the Earth (Genesis 7:10-12, 17-24; 8:1-4; 2 Peter 3:4-6) "from the highest peaks, men looked abroad upon shoreless

<sup>4</sup> The controversial concept between volume of Flood water versus pre-Deluge highest peaks and the presence of atmosphere "Canopy" can be studied in Whitcomb, John C. and Morris. Henry. *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and The Scientific Implications*

ocean[...].” (WHITE, 1980, p. 108) and, after the flood as the water began to subside, “the hills and mountains were surrounded by a vast, turbid sea[...].” (*Ibid*)

## THE IDEALISTIC “SEA” INTERPRETATION

Under this interpretation, the sea is viewed as a symbolic timeless experience. This methodology leads the reader to some interpretative perils in disguise. Such line reckons “Sea” like a merely figurative and non-literal fact, portraying human suffering, trials, pains, hardships and even persecution as it’s meaning. Once the concept “Sea” is encapsulated within such hermeneutic tool, the temptation in considering Heavens and Earth, as a just symbolic phrase is closer. This reasoning may produce a “domino effect” in other Bible teachings. Idealists, for example, imagine John never was in Patmos. The island was simply an imagination of the apostle, just a *catharsis*, a purge from a state of mind, an emotional stressful situation derived by the pain and horror of seeing the persecuted and scattered Christian church under Rome’s politics.<sup>5</sup> However, it must be reminded that, in the book of Revelation, suffering is not shown in a figurative or concealed way. It is a real portion of God’s children through history, which He promises to destroy (Rev 21: 4-5). The presence of a literal conflict and persecution against God’s principles and his people are also major themes in the Patmos writing (1: 9; 2: 10, 16; 12: 13, 17; 17: 14). These afflictions appear interacting within historicist prophetic outlook as well. Even thou, when it comes to be associated with the noun “waters” and its functionality in Revelation, the same Bible must be its own interpreter,<sup>6</sup> in other words, the same Scripture dictates when this liquid mass noun must be understood in a symbolic contextual operation (Rev 13: 1; 16: 12; 17: 15). Therefore, it is more logical to conclude that “Sea” in the context of 21: 1 is associated to a whole and literal Earth’s re-creation[...]<sup>7</sup>

5 See Eichorn, one of the key founders of New Testament German Criticism in Stuart, M. *A Commentary in the Apocalypse*. vol II: The story of the Seer of Patmos. Andover: Alien Morris and Wardwell. 2007:35-38. For a more recent idealist approach see Schüssler, Elizabeth. *Apocalypse*. Chicago: Herald Bible. 1985:30-43. From the same author: *The Apocalypse: Vision of a Just World*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991. For “eclecticism” and “timeless” approaches, see. Garland, A.C. *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentaron te Book of Revelation*. Vol I. Camano Island: Spirit and Truth.org. 2004:2,3 5,12,24.

6 The use of “leaven” has different meanings in the Bible: (1) it represents the kingdom of God (Luke 13:21; 16:6). (2) Contamination and sin (Exodo 12:15); (3) False teachings and traditions (Lucas 12:1; 26:17); (4). A literal sense (Galatians 5:7, 9). The Bible explains the leaven meaning context.

7 For an additional comment, see Bauckham Richard. *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. Cambridge University. 1993:49-50; Caird, Geroge B. *The Revelation of St. John*. Hendrickson. 1993: 260-265-266; Prigent Pierre. *Commentary on The Apocalypse of St. John*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. 2004:324-325 in Aune, David E. *52c. Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation 17-22*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson. 1998:1117.

as it was in Genesis before Sin. The expectation from Revelation 21: 1 must not be applied to a local emotional experience that took place in the apostle's emotional past during the Roman Empire in the first century A.D.

### THE “SEPARATION” APPROACH

Another possibility for the judgment “Sea is not any longer” could be understood by the fact the beloved apostle was discerning the literal Aegean Sea as a liquid wall of separation from their beloved friends in the Asia Minor and other parts of the Roman Empire. One interesting aspect on this island prison was the exiled knew well the oppressive meaning of the Latin phrase “*Mare Nostrum*” –Our Sea.<sup>8</sup> During the first century A.D, Rome was ruling the world even the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. In the Fourth Gospel, in citing “the Sea of Galilee” John plays one Emperor's name for that lake's identification. With this he inferred the Romans were ruling and taxing not only on the Seas but also upon the fish caught in the “Sea of Galilee.” On paying these taxes Jew fishermen were forced to remember it was Rome's Lake. The beloved apostle is the only evangelist in calling this lake as “the sea of Tiberias<sup>9</sup> (John 6:1).<sup>10</sup>

As a human being, John felt isolated in that rocky and penal island, far from their beloved church. The Aegean Sea was a deep gap between him and those he loved. But even in that barren place, he “made friends and converts.”<sup>11</sup> Something kindred to “friends far away” happened to E. G. White, when she settled in Elms Haven, after the Australian years as a missionary.<sup>12</sup> The enormous ocean separated now the many friends and the work she loved far away in Oceania.<sup>13</sup> It could be on this respect she would have written that Sea “[...] divides friends [...] is a barrier between the ones we love [...] our associations are broken by the broad fathomless ocean [...]”<sup>14</sup> In the new eternal kingdom, friends and loved ones shall not be divided from each other by this kind of sea never more.

8 [www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com). Online Etymology Dictionary “Mediterranean” (accessed in September 06, 2013), [article found in the Internet]. See also Tellegen, Olga B. *Short History of Roman Law* 1993. The phrase was coined after Carthage and their colonies conquests.

9 In the Greek τῆς θάλασσης τῆς Τιβερίάδος or “the sea of Tiberias”

10 For difficult passages or “ἀπορία” – difficult passages in the Fourth Gospel, see Burge, Gary M. *Interpreting The Gospel of John: Guides to New Testament Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker. 1992: 61-68.

11 E. G. White, *The Acts of The Apostles*. Printed for Remnant Publications by PPPA: Boise. 1993:357 [571-573]

12 White, Arthur. *Ellen G. White: The Australian Year: 1891-1900*. Vol 4 Hagerstown: Review & Herald. 1983, 8-447, 448-459.

13 White, Arthur. *Ellen G. White: The Early ElmsHaven Years: 1900-1905*. Vol 5. Hagerstown: Review & Herald. 1983.

14 *MS* 33, 1911.

Among those three previous suggested approaches, the first and the last are compatible with the literal understanding of “New Heavens and New Earth.” They are in harmony with the Bible teaching of a re-created world for the righteous to enjoy. On the contrary, the second view, favors the posture of an emotional fulfillment, allowing and facilitating a detaching process from the historic grammar methodology, where the literal New Creation is one of the great teachings in Revelation.

## THE CREATOR GOD

In the ancient Egyptian life, myth described a primordial mound or island of Creation “arose from a primeval ocean[...] and that a specific god created all the things from that location. Different cities claimed that place. This was represented to a shrine for a particular god: At Memphis, it was Ptah, god of craftsmen and architects. At Hermopolis, it was Thoth, god of the Moon, Magic and Writing. At Heliopolis, it was Re-Atum, god of the dead kings and the Sun.”<sup>15</sup> It is probably this type of cities and their god shrine promotion, among other things, that infused more people influx to visit and live in this populated areas. After all, ancient inhabitants, in their superstition would love to live where the god of creation was. This “best city” and its god creation propaganda is not detached by the fact that in some periods of ancient Egypt, a xenophobic approach was demonstrated in order to preserve their own traditions.<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, the book of Revelation shows the promise of Jesus Christ creating a new kingdom where none xenophobic race will inherit that realm. The blessings of Revelation 21:1 and the New Jerusalem are offered to everyone.[...] to every race, nation, tribe and tongue (Rev 14:6). The reason for this wide-open invitation is God so loved the world[...]the remaining verse portion, you know it by heart (John 3:16). This loving Creator has nails’ scars in His hands. He is a Mighty Royal Lion but has a Lamb’s heart (Rev 5; 6). He enjoys in creating New Heavens and New Earth, including Seas for us to enjoy but, let’s not forget this loving Savior also specializes in creating new hearts.[...]

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<sup>15</sup> NIV Archaeology Study Bible: An Illustrated walk through Biblical History and culture. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 2005:5.

<sup>16</sup> Magnusson, R. *The archaeology of the Bible Lands*. New York: Simon & Shuster. 1977: 59-61. The author reminds how ancient Egypt inscriptions did not record smacked, defeat and humiliating events against them and even created xenophobic narratives against Hebrews and Hyksos. One example is the Egyptian scribe Manetto. In the third century B.C.E. he wrote the Exodus was a product of few barbarians that elaborated a mega-narrative for more social influence.

## CONCLUSION

The words *yâm*, *thálassa* and *límne* inter act describing the value and importance that Ancient Near East people applied to different types of water masses. Ancients also, considered that the origin of life taking place on a piece of land surrounded by water. Referring to the utterance “and there is no more sea”, E. G. White proposes the “separation approach” for Revelation 21: 1. In the same way, the Johannine mind could have reflected the declaration “and there was no more sea” as a separation from his beloved church and friends. The fact of a different sea description in the pre-flood world done by Mrs. White, this allows the possibility of a “sea-lakes” approach in the New Earth. The “timeless” or idealist method of biblical interpretation on 21: 1 is unacceptable. The Bible clearly teaches about a literal New World. This type of interpretation (idealism) destroys the mechanism of the historical grammatical method by which SDA Adventists interpret the Scriptures.

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