

REVELATION 21:1-8 & 21:22-22:7

WEEK 10



Context & Historical Background

Revelation (not Revelations, and while we're at it: Kroger, not Krogers) is the last book of the New Testament. It was written by the Apostle John near the end of the first century as a letter to seven churches who were facing persecution for their faith. Revelation was written at a time when Christians for the first time were killed en masse by the Roman empire because of their faith. The emperor Nero, for example, tortured small groups of Christians by impaling them on poles in pitch then burns them up to provide the evening lighting for his dinner parties. In light of this and later Roman persecutions, John is writing to show these believers how God is still good in spite of their suffering.

Christians have always understood John's writings to apply to more than just talking about Roman persecution. It also illustrates the end of history, the return of Jesus, and the consummation of God's salvific plan. Getting into parsing out the details of Revelation is *not* important here. You're reading the final two chapters of Revelation. John has just finished envisioning Christ's return and final conquering of sin, once and for all (Ch. 19 & 20). In Chapters 21 & 22, he begins to paint a beautiful picture of God's kingdom fully restored on earth, where God finally sets right all that went wrong in Genesis 3. *That's* the focus.

A Note on Genre: This letter is not written like a normal letter (like Romans or 1 Peter). It is an *apocalyptic* writing (Daniel, parts of Isaiah or Ezekiel). In fact, "revelation" is the word *apokalypsis* in Greek. But it doesn't mean the world ending in cataclysmic turmoil or people leaving their clothes behind, it simply means "revealing" or "unveiling." It's full of imagery and symbolism. The problem is, much of the imagery and symbolism doesn't make sense to a 21st century person. But it was *full of meaning* to a 1st century Jewish-Christian. John references tons of Old Testament passages and images from other prophetic books.

It's important to remember that The Bible is less of a book, and more of a library. In a library, you aren't going to read every book the same. The same applies to the scriptures. We don't read the historical eyewitness accounts of Luke's Gospel the same way we read the poetic imagery of the Psalms. However, just because there are different literary styles in Scripture doesn't mean that we take parts of scripture any less seriously. Jesus took all of scripture *seriously* (checkout Luke 24:44), and so as Jesus followers we take all of Scripture seriously.



Related Scriptures

Genesis 1-3 - Garden of Eden references

Hebrews 11:16 – Longing for a heavenly country, God’s prepared city
Ephesians 5:25-27 – The Church as Christ’s bride



Key Terms

“Apocalypse”: a Greek word meaning “revelation”, “an unveiling or unfolding of things not previously known and which could not be known apart from the unveiling”

‘Apocalyptic’ writings are a style of prophetic writing that derives from Hebrew culture, often assuming a crisis situation where hope lies in God’s promised future intervention.

Jerusalem: Israel’s holy city, where the temple of God is, and the temple is God’s dwelling place with his people.

Alpha & Omega: These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.



Key Themes

The “With-God” life is restored: All the pain and sadness of this life has been removed once and for all. Most importantly, the “with-God” life has been restored. God is with his people, and his people are with Him. The curse of sin and death that alienated us from God has been broken (22:3). The relationship with the one who is the source of all goodness and beauty and peace has been restored—no longer felt in glimpses or moments, but fully and forever. They are so fully restored to the presence of God that by him they see all things (22:5).

Heaven Comes Down: Something interesting is going on here. *God’s people don’t leave Earth to go to Heaven. Heaven comes to God’s people on Earth.* Our hope in Jesus isn’t that we become floating cupids on clouds, laying around playing harps and singing worship songs in Heaven. We talk so much about going to heaven when we die, but actually the majority of the scriptures are not that worried about life after death. As N.T. Wright put it, the scriptures are concerned with “the life after life after death.” And even weirder, that life starts *now*, as Jesus indicates in John 17:3.

We are not simply waiting around until we die to be with Jesus, finally leaving the sinful world behind. No, we can begin cultivating a Kingdom life— eternal life—now. Dallas Willard calls this “training for reigning.” It’s kind of cheesy, but it makes a great point. We can be transformed by God’s grace, surrendering ourselves to Him through prayer and scripture and community. God is making us new, now!

Hope in the midst of suffering: But we can’t forget that this life doesn’t just suddenly become a cakewalk when we follow Jesus. We can cultivate a kingdom life now, but we will also experience troubles and struggles in this world. In John’s final chapters of Revelation, we are given hope to help us persevere through the troubles of this life. In the end, *God himself* will wipe

away the tears from our eyes and sadness will be no more.

Hope in the midst of false hopes: But this hope isn't just for the ugliness of life! It's also for the "false beauties" of life. John offers us *true hope in the midst of false hopes*. It's as challenging today as it was for the churches John was writing to, maybe even more so for us! Instagram is a great example of this. Instagram is a really cool app, and it can be a really neat way to stay connected. But then sometimes it feels like it bombards me with 'if you just had this technology then you would be successful' or 'if you just went to this restaurant then you would be satisfied' or 'if you just took a golden-hour pic in a field of sunflowers then people would think you were cool.' It's easy to catch ourselves wishing, *hoping* our lives could be as cool or adventurous or creative as the snapshots of life we see on Instagram. And that's the point: our hope isn't in adventure, or creativity, or being cool. It's in Christ! The life we long for—the ideal life, our true hope—is of a world without darkness, full of vibrancy and unending life. John reminds us that the life we truly hope for is found in the story of the God of the Bible.

☞ Quotes & Illustrations

"I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now...Come further up, come further in!" – Jewell the Unicorn, upon arriving in "Aslan's country."

C. S. LEWIS, *THE LAST BATTLE*

Because of the fall, death became the norm. Pain and suffering became the norm. But in God's new creation, these things have passed away. This is what life after life after death looks like. In *The Two Towers*, there is a scene where Frodo and Sam are ready to quit. But Sam gives a rousing speech that includes these very true lines:

"But in the end, it's just a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come and when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer...Folk in those stories were holding onto something...that there's some good in this world and it's worth fighting for."

J. R. R. TOLKIEN

"The best we can hope for in this life is a knothole peek at the shining realities ahead. Yet a glimpse is enough. It's enough to convince our hearts that whatever sufferings and sorrows currently assail us aren't worthy of comparison to that which waits over the horizon."

JONI EARECKSON TADA

"Remember Whose you are and Whom you serve. Provoke yourself by recollection, and your affection for God will increase tenfold; your imagination will not be starved any longer, but will be quick and enthusiastic, and your hope will be inexpressibly bright."

OSWALD CHAMBERS

“Simply by our proximity to Jesus, we can bring hope and life to people and places trapped in discouragement and despair.”

LOUIE GIGLIO

! Three Main Points

1. The entire trajectory of history is for God to be *with* his people, where we’re made *fully* alive in his presence.
2. True hope is found in Christ alone, not the false hopes of our culture.
3. God’s ending to his story gives our lives purpose *now*.

? Discussion Questions

- What are the images John uses to depict life in the presence of God? Will it literally look like this? What do these images suggest about what life redeemed and restored will be like?
- What are the false hopes of Americans? What are the false hopes of campus—the ones that your peers or your professors feed you? What are *your* false hopes—the things you pour yourself into, trusting that they’ll fulfill you?
- How do you actually put your hope in God? What do you do?
- When you think about heaven, is it a place where you really want to be? Do you really believe that the New Heaven and New Earth will be better than life now? (*Use these questions to uncover misguided feelings about Heaven and Earth. A lot of us don’t actually want to go to Heaven if it’s just being spiritual and singing songs and giving up this life in some capacity. It’s not that. This passage shows us that.*)
- How does this passage challenge your understanding of heaven and earth?
- What misconceptions about heaven and earth did you have?
- Is there anything confusing in this passage that you have a question about?
- What do you think God means when he says he’s making everything new? Is the old stuff going away? Is it getting changed?
- We like to ignore the tough parts of Scripture sometimes, but John says God tells him certain people *won’t* be part of this. What about these sins keeps people from God?
- God says that not only will he provide the thirst with water, but he’ll do so “without cost from the spring of the water of life.” This might be confusing, because it cost God a lot to save us, right? It cost the life of his son. What, then, does he mean here?
- What does this passage have to say about suffering in the end? How does Jesus’ life and resurrection help understand what resurrected life will be like?
- How does this passage, then, shape how we understand suffering now? How do we suffer, if at all?

Application & Practice

With God: The whole semester has been about life with God. Commit to having a quiet time every day over Christmas break. Set an alarm on your phone if you have to!

Hope: Schedule 30 minutes both weeks at home to read/pray/meditate/journal through Psalm 16. Let the words of David be your words. "Apart from you I have no good thing." "I keep my eyes always on the Lord."

Imagining the Kingdom: If you want a picture of the delight at the end of time, read C. S. Lewis' final book in the Narnia series, *The Last Battle*, over Christmas break. Remember, this is fiction, so just enjoy it!

How sin keeps you from Heaven: Want another great read over Christmas break? Lewis also wrote *The Great Divorce* (also fiction). It's about a bus ride from hell to heaven, and it shows how we choose hell when heaven is offered before our very eyes.

Going Deeper

"New Creation: The King Comes Back" - a sermon from John Mark Comer of Bridgetown Church

Ravi Zacharias on the Path to Heaven
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V06abnj--LE>

The Bible Project has some awesome and helpful videos:
<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/heaven-earth/>
<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/revelation/>

If you're a podcast person, checkout this great talk from Dr. Tim Mackie of The Bible Project:
<https://thebibleproject.com/podcast/resurrection-way-life-part-5-all-things-new-or-all-new-things/>

Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church by N. T. Wright - <https://www.amazon.com/Surprised-Hope-Rethinking-Resurrection-Mission/dp/0061551821>

Garden City by John Mark Comer.