

# The Redeemer Returns

## Summary and Goal

In this session, we will look at the Book of Revelation's teaching about the return of Christ and the renewal of all things. When Jesus comes back, He will be the conquering King who judges rebellion and purges this world of evil. Then the bringing together of heaven and earth will take place, and in the new heaven and new earth, God will dwell with His people—the people who trusted in the sacrifice of His Son and who will forever enjoy the fruit of His victory.

## Session Outline

1. The conquering King will return to judge rebellion (Rev. 19:11-16).
2. The conquering King will return to make all things new (Rev. 21:1-5).
3. The conquering King will return to be with His people forever (Rev. 22:1-5).

*Background Passage: Revelation 19–22*

## Session in a Sentence

Jesus will return as the conquering King who will judge all those who have rebelled against God and will make all things new so that His people can be with Him forever.

## Christ Connection

This present age will come to an end when Christ returns to fulfill His promises and reign with His people for all eternity. The relationship lost in the garden when Adam sinned will be gloriously restored when the garden city is unveiled and Jesus wipes away every tear from every eye. The way to be part of God's new world is to be cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, shed for our redemption.

## Missional Application

Because Christ has made us new creatures through His shed blood, we live in light of God's promise to make all things new and proclaim this message of hope to the suffering world around us.

Date of My Bible Study: \_\_\_\_\_

# Group Time

GROUP MEMBER CONTENT

## Introduction

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**EXPLAIN:** Use the paragraph on page 121 in the DDG to contrast the misplaced hopes of the world with the truth that Jesus will come again for justice and judgment.

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John Lennon’s 1971 song “Imagine” encouraged a generation to imagine there is no heaven or hell and instead to embrace living for today. Contrast Lennon’s sentiments with what Christians everywhere have always confessed in the Apostles’ Creed: “He will come again to judge the living and the dead.”

As we come to the end of our journey through the last book of the Bible, we must consider the New Testament’s teaching on the return of Christ and the making of all things new. A recent confession of faith puts it this way: “In God’s own time and way, the bodily risen and ascended Christ will visibly return to consummate God’s purpose for the whole cosmos through his victory over death and the devil.”<sup>1</sup> Part of that victory will be expressed in Christ’s judgment of the world. Justice and judgment go hand in hand. In order to make all things new, God will consign all falsehood, unbelief, sin, and evil to everlasting destruction.

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**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

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When you encounter the Bible’s portrayal of final judgment and renewal, what questions arise? What elements give you hope? What elements alarm you? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

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**SUMMARIZE:** In this session, we will look at the Book of Revelation’s teaching about the return of Christ and the renewal of all things. When Jesus comes back, He will be the conquering King who judges rebellion and purges this world of evil. Then the bringing together of heaven and earth will take place, and in the new heaven and new earth, God will dwell with His people—the people who trusted in the sacrifice of His Son and who will forever enjoy the fruit of His victory.

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## Point 1: The conquering King will return to judge rebellion (Rev. 19:11-16).

**READ** Revelation 19:11-16 (DDG p. 122).


<sup>11</sup> Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. <sup>12</sup> His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. <sup>13</sup> He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. <sup>14</sup> And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. <sup>15</sup> From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

**PACK ITEM 13: THE SECOND COMING:** Use the handout and the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 122) to make a brief comparison of Jesus' first and second comings. Share why the second coming should create comfort for believers but may cause concern for some people.

The horse rider in this vision is called "Faithful and True," a reference that clues us in to the identity of this messianic figure—this is Jesus (3:14). In His first coming, Jesus was sent to be judged on the cross for our sin in our place. But in His second coming, Jesus will return to execute judgment and reclaim His rightful rule over this rebellious world.

- For the original readers of Revelation, the idea of Christ's return in judgment brought comfort. Why? They faced ostracism and persecution for their beliefs. To those who suffer at the hands of the unjust, it is comforting to hold on to the promise that one day all will be made right. This upside-down, crazy world will not go on in its current state forever. God will execute justice.
- The reason people sometimes resist the idea of perfect justice is this: deep down, we know we deserve judgment. When we imagine our place within the cosmic story of redemption, we come to realize we are more than passive victims of evil's consequences. We are evil insurrectionists ourselves, rebels against the good and loving authority of our Creator. We thirst for justice, but once we consider the fairness of God, we quickly discover that Christ's return can only be good news if we have found mercy in God's sight.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

 Why should Christians in places where persecution is severe find so much hope in this promise of coming judgment? (Jesus will set things right and vindicate His people; believers can know that all persecution is temporary; Jesus' coming will validate the faith of believers and their Spirit-empowered good works in Jesus' name; persecuted believers will finally be able to rest in pure and complete peace)

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**EXPLAIN:** Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 122) to explain the necessity of God’s judgment through Christ’s second coming as part of the gospel.

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Once we understand God’s judgment as putting an end to all that is wrong with the world (war, famine, disease, and so on), then we can understand why Jesus rides a horse and the apostle Paul viewed judgment as part of his gospel (Rom. 2:15-16). Take away the notion of judgment and you rob Christianity of any hope of satisfying our longing for justice, a longing built into us by our just and wise God. Without judgment, the gospel fails to deal with the problem of evil and the detrimental ways we humans treat each other and, by extension, God. Once we take away judgment, we lose the gravity of our sin. Once we lose sight of our sinfulness, we short-circuit our experience of the powerful gratitude that comes from receiving grace.

 **Voices from the Church**

“The Bible says that God’s wrath flows from his love and delight in his creation. He is angry at evil and injustice because it is destroying its peace and integrity.”<sup>2</sup>

—Timothy Keller

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- The Old Testament also sees God’s judgment as good news. Psalm 96:11-13 says: “Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice . . . Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.” Apparently, the writers of our Bible had no problem celebrating judgment as good news. The idea of Jesus coming to judge the living and the dead was cause not only for comfort but also for celebration.
  - Eternal judgment makes sense only if we understand that we live in a good world created by a loving God. When we sense the inherent goodness of the world God created, we then are able to see—with God’s eyes—the destruction and heartache that sin has unleashed in the world. We see why creation is groaning for redemption and judgment—not the destroying fire of God but the purging fire that will lay bare everything in this world that defaces it and leave room for God’s presence to fill it once again.
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## Point 2: The conquering King will return to make all things new (Rev. 21:1-5).

**SAY:** In between Revelation 19 and 21 comes Revelation 20, one of the most challenging and controversial passages in the New Testament. It concerns “the millennium,” a period of time that has vexed interpreters of the Bible for nearly two millennia now. The various approaches to interpreting Revelation often revolve around one’s view of how best to understand and place this period of time. Most confessions of faith do not take a position on the millennium, and often there are differences of perspective even within the same local congregation of believers. The important thing to remember is that all the views of Revelation eventually wind up in the same place, as we see in this passage—Revelation 21. In the end, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us will dwell among us once more, and this time *forever*.

**FILL IN THE BLANKS:** Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 123).

**Second Coming of Christ:** The Bible is clear that one day Christ will return in **bodily** form to rule and reign over all creation. Scripture gives no timeline as to when it will occur, only assuring that it will be **unexpected** and **glorious**. Because of the mystery surrounding these events, several views have emerged about this return and His millennial reign. Despite their differences, all views agree that the **imminent** return of Christ is the hope of every Christian, knowing that when Christ returns, all things will be made **new**.

**Essential Doctrine “Second Coming of Christ”:** The Bible is clear that one day Christ will return in **bodily** form (Matt. 24–25) to rule and reign over all creation. Scripture gives no timeline as to when it will occur (Acts 1:7), only assuring that it will be **unexpected** (Matt. 25:8-10) and **glorious** (Matt. 24:30). Because of the mystery surrounding these events, several views have emerged in Christians’ attempts to understand everything the Bible teaches about this return and His millennial reign. One view holds that upon His return, Jesus will begin a literal 1000-year reign on earth (*historical premillennialism*; a recent variation called *dispensationalism*, or *pre-tribulation premillennialism*, places the “rapture” prior to a seven-year period of tribulation that precedes the millennium). Another holds that this millennium occurs in this church age, to be followed by His return (*postmillennialism*). Another still holds that the millennium symbolically represents Christ’s reign in heaven and in the hearts of God’s people while we wait for His return (*amillennialism*). Despite these differences, all views agree that the **imminent** return of Christ is the hope of every Christian, knowing that when Christ returns, all things will be made **new**.

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**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read Revelation 21:1-5 (DDG p. 123).

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<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”  
<sup>5</sup> And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

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**EXPLAIN:** Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 123) to emphasize that the hope of the Christian is a resurrected existence on a physical, transformed earth in the presence of God forever.

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The picture we see in Revelation 21 is the marriage of heaven and earth. Once sin is banished from the earth and all evil is judged, then the new Jerusalem will descend from heaven to earth. Our ultimate destination, as Christ’s followers, is not a disembodied existence somewhere out there in the skies but a resurrected existence on a physical, transformed earth. Heaven may be where our spirits go when we die, but it isn’t our final destination. Our bodies will be resurrected at the end of time, and we will enjoy the new earth, filled with the presence of God forever.

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- Some believe the point of Christianity is to “get saved” on earth to be assured of a heavenly afterlife, as if the goal is to go away and be with God forever. The biblical portrait we see in Revelation 21 is different. The ultimate future is not “going to heaven when we die” but heaven and earth being reunited at the end of time. It’s not going away to be with God but God coming to be with us.
- The God who once walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the garden will once again be present with His people in the garden city of the new Jerusalem. The presence of God will fill the earth. We will be with Him forever because He is Emmanuel and He has come to dwell with us. With glorified bodies after our resurrection, we will worship Him with never-ending wonder.

*Illustration:* Stanza 3 from “This Is My Father’s World”: “This is my Father’s world, O let me ne’er forget That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet. This is my Father’s world, The battle is not done; Jesus who died shall be satisfied, And earth and heav’n be one.”<sup>3</sup> Earth and heaven as one—that is the view we see in Revelation 21.

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**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

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Take another look at Revelation 21:1-5 and note what will be present and what will be absent. How does your heart respond to this vision? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

### Point 3: The conquering King will return to be with His people forever (Rev. 22:1-5).

**READ** Revelation 22:1-5 (DDG p. 124).

<sup>1</sup> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup> No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. <sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the first paragraph and the table below in the DDG (p. 124) to help your group see some parallels between the first chapters of Genesis and the final chapters of Revelation.

We've arrived at the final chapter of the Bible, and God is bringing things full circle, but in a new and better way. Genesis began with Adam and Eve and the tree of life in the garden of Eden, but they were exiled because of their sin. Now the last book of the Bible gives us a glimpse of the new Jerusalem, a garden city in which the tree of life brings healing and fruitfulness forever to God's resurrected and restored people.

GENESIS <sup>4</sup>	REVELATION
Night established (1:5)	No <b>night</b> there (22:5)
Sun created (1:16)	No need of the <b>sun</b> (21:23)
The <b>curse</b> announced (3:14-19)	No more <b>curse</b> (22:3)
<b>Death</b> enters history (3:19,24)	<b>Death</b> exits history (21:4)

**FILL IN THE BLANKS:** Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 124).

**New Heaven and New Earth:** When Christ returns and the children of God are revealed, the physical world itself will undergo a similar **transformation**, a new heaven and a new earth. Scripture describes the new earth as a **city** and as a physical place that will include eating and drinking. Best of all, **Christ** will be all and in all, and we shall see Him face to face.

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**Essential Doctrine “New Heaven and New Earth”:** When Christ returns and the children of God are revealed, the creation itself will be made new. Like the resurrected bodies that Christians will one day receive, the physical world itself will undergo a similar **transformation**, so much so that the Scriptures describe it as a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pet. 3:13). Scripture describes the new earth as a **city** (Rev. 21:10-11,21-26) and as a physical place that will include eating and drinking (Luke 22:18; Rev. 19:9). Best of all, **Christ** will be all and in all, and we shall see Him face to face.

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**EXPLAIN:** Use the leader content below to emphasize that the most important aspect of the new Jerusalem will be who is at the center of it all—Jesus, the Lamb, the Son of God.

- The most important part about this image of the new earth is who is at the center of it all. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in this city. The servants of God will see His face. We will be marked out as His people, and we will worship Him forever with the light of God shining on us non-stop. God will sustain us, and we will respond to His goodness and majesty with worship and praise. The One who knows us will be present with us, and we will see Him. We will reign with Him forever and ever, just as God always intended humans to reign over His good earth.
  - What kind of world is this? A world with no more war, with no more famine, with no more disease or disaster. In short, a world with no more “curse” (Rev. 22:3). The awful effects of humanity’s sin will be overcome by the Lamb who was slain, by the Messiah who became a curse for us and took our punishment upon Himself (Gal. 3:13).
  - The blessed man of Psalm 1, whose roots go deep and who is like a tree bearing fruit in its season, will be fulfilled ultimately in Jesus, and we—His beloved people—will share in the abundance of His fruitfulness forever. The Lamb will rule, and we who share in His victory will reign with Him.
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**PACK ITEM 14: THE NEW JERUSALEM:** Read the **C. S. Lewis quote** on this poster and ask group members the following question.

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What impact should the promised vision of Revelation 22 have on our actions today? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)



# My Mission

**EXPLAIN:** How should we see our mission in light of Revelation 22? The end of the Bible helps us see our world today in light of eternity, stressing the need to call people to repentance and faith so that others will experience everlasting blessing from God. The image of a world of perfect peace also gives us hope as we work to spread the fragrance of that final state even now, in anticipation of what only Jesus will bring in the end. We are to live in such a way that others see a glimpse of the grace and glory of God.

**READ** the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 125), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God's Word.

Because Christ has made us new creatures through His shed blood, we live in light of God's promise to make all things new and proclaim this message of hope to the suffering world around us.

- **How will the picture of the beginning of God's new world impact your worship today?**
- **What are some ways your group can give people a foretaste of the glory to come when Jesus returns?**
- **In what ways does the message of final judgment give urgency to our evangelism?**

## Voices from the Church

"The first thing I plan to do on resurrected legs is to drop on grateful, glorified knees. I will quietly kneel at the feet of Jesus."<sup>5</sup>

—Joni Eareckson Tada

**CLOSE IN PRAYER:** Lord Jesus, You are the King who is coming to strike down Your enemies and rule the nations. Thank You for sparing us from final judgment by first shedding Your own blood on our behalf. Because of Your incarnation, death, resurrection, and second coming, God's dwelling will once again be with humanity; death, grief, crying, and pain will be no more. May the Holy Spirit grant us holy anticipation for the day when we will worship God and the Lamb in glorified bodies, having been saved to sin no more. Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

**INSTRUCT:** As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the **Daily Study** devotions in their DDG (pp. 126-128), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use **Encourage One Another** (p. 129) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God's Word.

# Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The **Daily Study** devotions in the DDG (pp. 126-128) will help group members get into God's Word and study it for themselves. **Encourage One Another** (p. 129) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

## Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 126-128) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for **Day 1** as a part of point 1 in the session: **A god who is never angered at sin and who lets evil go by unpunished is not worthy of worship. The problem isn't that the judgment-less god is too loving; it's that he is not loving enough.**



Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God's Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- **Day 3:** "The promise of Revelation 21 is that God will wipe away every tear; the weight of this present moment won't compare to the joy promised tomorrow."
- **Day 5:** "God did not give us this book in order to satisfy intellectual curiosities but as a presentation of Jesus intended to change our lives now in the present."



Visit [www.GospelProject.com/Blog](http://www.GospelProject.com/Blog) for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God's Word.

## Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member's DDG (p. 129) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using *The Gospel Project* in their groups.

- **Encourage group members to consider that for those in Christ, every desire and longing of their hearts will be satisfied in the new heaven and new earth.**
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.

# Additional Commentary

## **Point 1: The conquering King will return to judge rebellion (Rev. 19:11-16).**

“Suddenly, John saw the one he should worship, riding a *white horse* at the head of his armies. The rider is called *Faithful and True*—a name reflecting the eternal attributes of the Messiah (19:11). He is no longer the Lamb but the noble warrior who comes to save the righteous and punish the wicked. His eyes like *blazing fire* can discern truth from error, just as fire can test the purity of metal (19:12; 1:14). The *many crowns* on his head represent his status as the King of kings ... Christ’s special *name ... that no one knows but he himself* further indicates his power. Knowing someone’s name was often interpreted as having power over the person. If no one knows the Messiah’s name, no one can have power over him. He reigns supreme.”<sup>6</sup>

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“Three images—a sword, a staff, and a winepress—depict the unparalleled authority of the returning King. Old Testament references once again drive the argument of these verses. ‘A sharp sword came from His mouth’ draws from Isaiah 11:4 (see Rev. 1:16; 2:12,16; also 2 Thess. 2:8). His powerful word is the means by which He will ‘strike the nations with it. He will shepherd them with an iron scepter.’ This draws from Psalm 2:8-9 (see Rev. 2:26-27; 12:5; also Isa. 11:4). Further, ‘He will also trample the winepress of the fierce anger of God, the Almighty.’ This harks back to Isaiah 63:1-6 (see Joel 3:13-14; Rev. 14:19-20; 16:19). He can judge the world in such vivid wrath because He is ‘God, the Almighty,’ the Sovereign God (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7,14; 19:6; 21:22). He can do all of this because on His robe along the thigh He has a name, a fifth name: ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’ (17:14; see also Deut. 10:17; Dan. 2:47). He and He alone is the sovereign King and Lord. He has no equal and no competition. He possesses full divine authority and absolute power over all things (Matt. 28:16-20). This is who He is. This is He who is coming. It is a day His followers look, pray, and sing for!”<sup>7</sup>

## **Point 2: The conquering King will return to make all things new (Rev. 21:1-5).**

“John goes on to describe the arrival of the new heavens and new earth, which takes the form of the new Jerusalem descending from heaven, described as a bride on her wedding day. Its arrival signals that God is truly, fully, and finally dwelling with his people. Just as the story of the original exodus ended with the construction of the tabernacle and the divine glory coming to dwell in it, so this new exodus finishes not with humans going up to heaven but with the God of heaven coming to earth. This will signal the end of suffering, and the old order of sin and death passing away. The abolition of ‘the first heaven and the first earth’ (21:1) does not mean that God will destroy the present space-time world and create a new one from scratch; the ‘oldness’ of the first heaven and earth consists precisely in their corruption, their subjection to decay and death (see Rom. 8:18-30). God now speaks directly from his throne, declaring that all things are made new (21:1-8).”<sup>8</sup>

“John sees a ‘new heaven and a new earth’ (21:1a) in fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22. These prophecies, though fulfilled in an initial manner in Christ’s death and resurrection, are now fulfilled in their fullness in the new heavens and earth. The phrase ‘no longer any sea’ (21:1b) is rooted in the Old Testament conception of sin and rebellion, as it refers to the threat of evil and tribulation for God’s people (e.g., Ps. 74:12-15; Ezek. 32:2; Dan. 7:2). In the eternal state, then, there is no potentiality for evil and oppression ... The image of the city is symbolic, representing the fellowship of God with his people, both Jews and Gentiles, in the eternal new creation. The voice in 21:3 explains the city and marriage metaphors of 21:2 ... (see Lev. 26:11-12; Ezek. 37:27). In the new heavens and earth, God’s people will no longer experience any of the forms of suffering characteristic of the old creation (21:4).”<sup>9</sup>

### **Point 3: The conquering King will return to be with His people forever (Rev. 22:1-5).**

“The **river of the water of life** looks back to Ezekiel 47, as well as to Jesus’s promise about the Holy Spirit flowing as ‘streams of living water’ (John 7:37-39) from those who believe in him. The **tree of life** was in the center of the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9; 3:3). After the fall of mankind into sin, God denied humanity access to the tree (Gen. 3:24). Ezekiel 47:12 speaks of trees that bear fruit with medicinal value. The wording here pictures the new Jerusalem as the new and permanent ‘Eden,’ where **there will no longer be any curse** (see Gen. 3:14-19). As Adam and Eve enjoyed unbroken fellowship with the Lord in the garden prior to the fall (Gen. 3:8), how much more will God’s servants enjoy his constant presence in the new ‘Eden.’ All inhabitants will have **his name on their foreheads**, as was the case with the 144,000 (14:1).”<sup>10</sup>

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“There is no temple in the new Jerusalem because there is no more need for a building in which humans can meet with God. We will meet with God himself directly in the person of the Lamb. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, the corruption of their hearts and our world created separation from our holy God. Throughout history, the tabernacle and then the temple provided microcosmic restorations of the fellowship enjoyed in Eden. In the new earth, we have unhindered access to the fellowship, goodness, and glory of our God (presented here in terms of a new and improved Paradise; 22:3,15). All this is because of the gospel.”<sup>11</sup>

## References

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