

**A New Heaven  
Revelation 22  
Week 13****Opening Prayer**

Ask if anyone would like to open in prayer. They can pray on their own or use the prayer printed below. It also might be a good idea to reach out to a group member prior to your meeting and ask them ahead of time if they'd be willing to open in prayer. That's a great way to encourage participation without putting anyone on the spot.

*Gracious God, as we come together to place our lives in front of your Holy Word, we pray that you would give us wisdom and understanding. May we approach this sacred text with humility, curiosity, expectancy and love. Be among us and in our conversation through the power of your Holy Spirit. We pray in the name of the one to whom this whole story points, Jesus the Christ, amen.*

Depending on time constraints you may want to take a bit of extra time to check in with folks and see how they're doing. You could also wait and do this at the end of the session before closing in prayer.

**Check-in question**

*Each week, give an opportunity for folks to either respond to the check-in question below or, if they'd rather, share something that came up for them as they were reading the other texts assigned for the Big Read this week.*

**When you think of heaven what do you think of? What has formed your understanding of heaven?**

**Background**

Take some time as a group or separately to watch the Bible Project videos below as they help to frame Revelation and give insight into the most faithful ways to read this unique genre of apocalyptic literature.

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/revelation/>

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/apocalyptic-literature/>

John knows that human language is incapable of expressing, just as human imagination is incapable of perceiving, the reality of things in the eternal world as they truly are. But rather than being paralyzed by the finitude of human experience, he is set free to portray the End in a variety of this-worldly pictures used metaphorically to allow the character of the eternal world to break through.

John has already given remarkable expression to the Christian conviction that at the End we meet not an event but a Person. All Revelation's statements about the "End" are really statements about God.<sup>1</sup>

### **Verses 1-6**

The waters of life promised in Revelation 21:6 are now pictured as a river flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb. This imagery goes back to the description of Eden in Genesis 2:9-10, although in these verses it is the tree and not the river that has the name "life".

Chapter 22 of Revelation harks back to the picture of Creation before the Fall. Yet it is not the same. The redemption of the world is not a simple return to the original creation.<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of things, humanity was perverted by its original rebellion against the Creator, wanting to be its own god. When sin entered the good creation, the world itself felt the blow, and a curse was pronounced on the earth (Gen 3:17), so that all historical human existence has been lived out in a fallen world. John's vision of the new Jerusalem pictures a purified and redeemed humanity and a fallen world delivered from the bondage of evil by the God whose grace transforms individual people AND all of creation "far as the curse is found."<sup>3</sup>

Verses 3-4 indicate that the Throne of God and of the Lamb is in the city among the people. Heaven is now on earth, and God's servants will perform their service to God without a temple. They will see God's face, the ultimate privilege denied to all until now – not even Moses was allowed to see God's face (Exodus 33:20).

From the very beginning of the vision (2:17; 3:12) the righteous have been promised knowledge of the name of God. Understanding what one's name is, and should be, is crucial. Possession of the right name enables confession before God and entry into the Book of Life.<sup>4</sup>

### **Verses 6-16**

Several pronouns in this section are somewhat ambiguous. In 22:6 and 22:10 the "he" who speaks may be the angel who has shown John the city. But in 22:7 the "I" is Jesus speaking in the first person. He announces the closeness of the end time, when he will come again. He then gives a blessing to those who are faithful to the vision given to John.

---

<sup>1</sup> Boring, M. Eugene. *Interpretation: Revelation*. John Knox Press: Louisville, KY. 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Gonzalez, Justo and Catherine Gunsalus. *Westminster Bible Companion: Revelation*. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, KY. 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Boring, M. Eugene. *Interpretation: Revelation*. John Knox Press: Louisville, KY. 1989.

<sup>4</sup> New Interpreter's Bible: Revelation. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN.

As in 19:10, when the angel assures John of the trustworthiness of what he has been told, John falls to the feet of the angel to worship him, only to be told not to do so. God only is to be worshiped. The angel and John are fellow servants, along with all those who are prophets with the faithful.

It is the angel who tells John not to seal the book that he has written (22:10). This is unlike the visions of Daniel, who was told to seal up his writings, because the time had not yet come for the events depicted in his vision to happen (Daniel 8:26). John's vision does refer to future times, but his message clearly is for the Christians of his own day, urging them to remain faithful. It has no need to be sealed. Its time has come, even as the vision is being received.<sup>5</sup>

The heavenly vision has ended with majestic strains of "Hallelujah" and now John provides worshipers with a needed transition back to the world of the here and now, back to the familiar church setting of Asia.

### **Verses 17-21**

The final section of Revelation is not only an ending; it is also a beginning. There is an invitation issued by the Spirit and the bride. The invitation is to come to take the water of life.

Revelation ends as it began, a letter from an exiled pastor-prophet to be read forth in the worship services of the Asian churches. Like Paul's letters, this letter is designed to be read in the liturgy, probably just prior to the celebration of the Eucharist.

In Rev. 1:8 God has said that he is the Alpha and the Omega and again in 21:6 where he adds, the Beginning and the End. Now the identical expression is applied by the risen Christ to himself, with the insertion of the First and the Last. All three expressions mean much the same and they set Christ apart from all created beings. None other than God could share in these titles of God.<sup>6</sup>

## **Read Revelation 22 (focusing on verse 1-6)**

### **Initial Reactions**

1. What from this passage confuses, inspires, or resonates with you? What questions or curiosities do you have about this passage?
2. What does this passage tell us about God? What does this story tell us about humanity?
3. Were there any images, stories or insights that stuck out to you from Sunday's sermon?

---

<sup>5</sup> Gonzalez, Justo and Catherine Gunsalus. *Westminster Bible Companion: Revelation*. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, KY. 1989

<sup>6</sup> Morris, Leon. *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Revelation*. Intervarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL. 2009.

**Going Deeper**

4. Revelation 22:1 mentions “the river of the water of life.” In John 4:7-14, Jesus uses a similar image in his discussion with the Samaritan woman at the well. What do you think is being referred to here? How might you compare the two passages?
5. What warnings and invitations does the Bible end with? Why are these important for us to take to heart?
6. Three times Jesus speaks of coming soon (22:7, 12, 20). How should this impact our witness, our worship, our work, our values, our treatment of others, our time in God’s Word & prayer, our love for His church, etc? How might these last words of Jesus motivate, challenge or comfort you?

**Big Read Recap**

7. What has been the most rewarding part of the Big Read study this fall?
8. What has been the most challenging part of the Big Read study this fall?
9. Is there one story, character, lesson etc. that has stuck with you from this series?
10. Though the level of commitment to reading Scripture like this every day may not be maintainable, what new practice or discipline might you incorporate into the new year as we wrap up this journey through the Bible together?

**Closing**

Check in if you haven’t already done so and ask for any prayer requests. Encourage group members to write down these requests and follow up as necessary. Close with prayer.