

(40) THE NEVERENDING AWAITS: REVELATION 21-22

- Focus Idea:** Final victory and celebration await the people of God. In the Great Miracle still to come, Jesus will reign forever with his people in a New Heaven and a New Earth.
- The Context:** Revelation is the last book in the Bible. Written near the end of the First Century AD, Revelation is a work of encouragement, social commentary, and prophecy. The text is in the form of *apocalyptic literature*, a style of writing that employs vivid images of otherworldly creatures, places, and experiences to bring transformation and hope to communities of believers.
- Revelation begins with a series of warnings and lessons for early churches located in Western Asia (Chapters 1-3) and continues with a series of visions and oracles meant to show persecuted Christians that God was in control of the world and would ultimately set things right (Chapters 4-20). Chapters 21 and 22 end the book.
- The Characters:** The author of Revelation is John, but *which* John this is remains unclear. Some have suggested that the writer is one of Jesus' original twelve disciples, but this cannot be proven. What is known is that the author represented a threat to the interests of imperial Rome and had been placed in exile (1:9).
- The Core:** Where is the world going? How will it all end? Is humankind headed for a fiery collapse, or is there a chance that salvation and a new creation might yet come?
- Revelation 21 and 22 represent the final passages in the Christian Bible. They bravely answer the big questions about the future with a triumphant vision: God and his people will be united forever in joy.
- The text is rich with allusions back to core passages from the Old Testament. It also weaves in unprecedented expectations for the future. The opening verses are astonishingly hopeful: The first heaven and first earth will pass away when the New Jerusalem comes down as a gift from God. At that time, God will live and reign forever among the people that have loved and worshipped him. He will end all pain and woe, and, like a parent with a newborn, will wipe every tear from their eyes (21:1-4).
- The New Jerusalem is of such majesty that John can scarcely find the adjectives to describe it. It will be like gold and crystal and jewels upon a mountain. Everything there can be measured in twelves – the symbolic number of the complete people of God (21:9-21). It will be illuminated by the Lamb rather than celestial spheres. It remains engaged with the nations of the world (21:22-27)
- Chapter 22, the final chapter of the Bible, draws on images introduced in the *second* chapter. The once-forsaken Tree of Life (see Genesis 2) again provides nourishment and healing for the nations. A beautiful river offers refreshment for the world. And the servants of God, longsuffering through persecution, will reign with God forever and ever (22:1-5).
- The Bible ends with the promise of reunion. Three times the voice is heard "I am coming soon!" (22:7; 22:12; 22:20). The people of God welcome Jesus' second advent (22:20b). They treasure his words (22:7, 18-20) and look expectantly for his arrival.
- Through it all, the voice of the Spirit and the Bride (the Church) repeat their call: Come! Come! Come! There is still time, there is still opportunity! The neverending awaits all who place their hope in Jesus!