

Bible Study Guide

PASTORATE

November 7, 2012

Lectionary Readings

Isaiah 25:6–9; Psalm 24; **Revelation 21:1–6a**; John 11:32–44

Background

Revelation 21–22 are not only the last chapters of the last book of the Bible, but also the final resolution of the entire biblical narrative, forming a strong thematic bookend with Genesis 1–2 that spans from creation to new creation. These two concluding chapters present a vision of God’s ultimate purposes for his world being fulfilled, heaven and earth finally being reunited and the realization of all the hopes and dreams of God’s people. All of the Bible’s promises and prophetic visions reach their resting place here at the consummation of God’s plan for creation. This is the world as God intended: humankind living at one with God, with each other, and with the created order.

The first eight verses of chapter 21 form a kind of thesis paragraph for what’s to follow, which is later unpacked in two directions: (1) the Holy City as the new Holy of Holies (21:9–27), and (2) the new garden of Eden that surrounds the Holy City (22:1–5).

Revelation 21:1–6a

¹ 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. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” ⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶ Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.”

Commentary

The first two verses describe the arrival of the New Jerusalem from heaven to earth as “a new heaven and a new earth,” an allusion to the promises spoken in Isaiah 65:17–25. This vision is not about souls leaving earth for a disembodied existence in heaven, but rather about heaven coming down to earth so that God’s people can experience embodied resurrected life here on earth. The word *new* here does not mean brand new in the sense that God destroys his creation and starts all over, but rather *renewed* in the sense that God transforms his world by removing all evil and sin. In the same way that God transforms a believer into a new creation without destroying the person (2 Cor 5:17), so too new creation is the renovation of God’s world instead of its destruction.

A voice explains the significance of this vision in verses 3–4: the fulfillment of all the Old Testament hopes and the removal of all suffering for God’s people. Throughout the OT, God promises in his covenant with Israel, “My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Ezek 37:27; cf. Exod 29:45; Lev 26:11–12; Jer 31:33). When this occurs, God alleviates death, evil, and suffering, and in their place unspeakable joy comes rushing in. And those who overcome (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26–28; 3:5, 12, 21) will get to experience these benefits of God’s new creation. Paul himself looked forward to this day: “The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now” (Rom 8:21–22).

Then in verse 5, God himself speaks and declares that he has finished his work of redemption. Salvation history is at an end and the future age can now begin. The promise that God is even now “making all things new” would encourage the churches reading this because, though not yet complete, God’s world-encompassing salvation was already at work. As the “Alpha and Omega,” God oversaw this project from beginning to end. He is King, and so he will ensure that history will arrive at this place. God begins history with creation and ends it with new creation. Such a vision of the future, as is all of Revelation, is intended to spur the church toward greater faithfulness in the present so that they might one day inherit the life of the age of the come.

Discussion Questions

1. What questions did this passage raise in your mind?
2. Which part of this passage convicts you the most? Why?
3. Which part of this passage inspires you the most? Why?
4. What part of this passage is difficult to understand?
5. How does your vision of God’s promised future compare and contrast with what is described in this passage?
6. How does this vision of the future—the complete restoration of God’s world—spur us on toward greater faithfulness today?
7. What did you learn about God from this passage?
8. Regardless of where your faith is at right now, if you were to apply what we learned about God to something in your life this week, what would that be?

The Collect of the Day

Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord: Give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.