



# LifeGroup Study

August 4, 2024 Revelation 21:1-8; Psalm 105

READING RESOURCE: *Revelation and the End of All Things* by Craig R. Koester.

## Community

### TODAY'S THEME

Creation begins in a garden and ends in a city, the new Jerusalem. The gospel invites us to partner with God now to make heaven on earth: “thy Kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.” God, by grace, will one day bring that work to fruition, and a vision of that glorious event is found in our text today. Heaven and earth will connect intimately, like a bride and a groom. God is making all things new!

### WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

If the end of the story is God’s will being done on earth as it is in heaven, then our lives are a daily surrendering to the Spirit of God working in and through us in this world. No matter how difficult the journey, no matter how challenging our circumstances, no matter how dark the day, we do not lose hope because we know how the story ends. God wins, and because of grace, so do we.

### WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

We want to surrender daily to the Spirit of God working in and through us and to proclaim God’s victory over all things by giving generously of our time, skills, experiences and financial resources.

### INTRODUCTION

According to a web site here are some of the favorite children's books of all time: *Where the Wild Things Are*; *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*; *The Giving Tree*; *Green Eggs and Ham*; *Goodnight Moon*; *light Moon*; *Charlotte’s Web*; *The Cat in the Hat*; *Where the Sidewalk Ends*; *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*; *Love You Forever*.

### ICEBREAKER

Do you like to read? Why or why not? What’s your favorite book? What’s one book you want to read next?

### PRAY TOGETHER

Father God, you are writing a story that begins with your promises made thousands of years ago and culminates in all things being made brand new. You call us to Kingdom–living, where the thirsty are refreshed, the broken are made whole, the grieving are comforted and the hopeless are sustained. Help us to catch your vision of a world where everything is being made brand new. In the difficult days of our life’s journey, help us to never lose hope because we know that, in the end, you reign over all things. Amen.

## Content

### BACKGROUND

Once again, it is critically important to remember the context for this entire book. John is addressing seven churches who are struggling to stay faithful to Jesus in a culture that is declining morally and obsessed with Caesar and all things Roman. More than anything, the imagery of Revelation is meant to both warn and encourage these early Christians.

Today’s reading is a bridge of sorts, spanning the end of one era and the beginning of another. All of creation, all of God’s work of renewal, reconciliation and redemption, have been leading up to this stunning moment. Much of John’s revelation has roots in the Hebrew scriptures, as well as other apocryphal books. These verses express the fulfillment of God’s promises.

- The promise of a new heaven and a new earth (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22)
  - The promise of a new Jerusalem (Isaiah 65:18)
  - The promise that the new Jerusalem will be adorned as a bride for her husband (Isaiah 52:1; 61:10; 65:18)
  - The promise that God’s dwelling will be among his people (Ezekiel 37:27)
  - The promise that God will dwell with them, and that they will be his people (covenant language; Zechariah 2:10-11))
  - The promise that God will wipe away every tear and that death will be no more (Isaiah 25:8)
  - The promise that sorrow and pain will end and all former things will pass away (Isaiah 65:17, 19)
  - The promise that God will make all things new (Isaiah 43:19)
  - The promise to give water to the thirsty (Isaiah 55:1)
- (Read Revelation 21:1-8 together.)*

The recipients of John’s letter would have recognized that he was assuring them that God would fulfill every promise, no matter how challenging life is at that moment. This vision, therefore, would have had tremendous power to comfort, encourage and strengthen.

**DISCUSSION** Which words of comfort in these verses are the most important for you right now?

There is tension within the text, and among Biblical scholars, regarding the new creation, a tension between renewal and replacement. Will God utterly destroy the old and create something entirely new, or is God so renewing the old that it is called new? Both ideas existed in early Judaism, though the lack of a sea may imply the replacement theory. That there will no longer be any sea is an interesting detail, and its significance is debatable. Generally, the sea is connected both with chaos and evil in scripture as well as in Canaanite mythology. Therefore, its absence likely signifies the destruction of evil.

**DISCUSSION** Do you think God is going to destroy the old and start fresh, or renew the old? Why?

Jerusalem was thought to be the dwelling place of God, especially the Holy of Holies within the temple. Throughout Israel's history, Israelites had turned away from God, defiling the city (which is synonymous with its inhabitants). God had continually called his people back to him, but here at the end, God announces that he chooses to dwell with all humanity. This is a gift, as is the new city. Again, the language that is used ("I will be your God and you will be my people") is old covenant language and an assurance of God's faithfulness.

**DISCUSSION** How is this picture of God coming to be with us different from what you may have previously thought?

In a culture of decadence, violence and moral decline, Jesus' words from the throne would ring out with great hope: "I am making everything new." Jesus will indeed fulfill every promise. This proclamation is so certain that John is instructed to write it down. These words are "trustworthy and true." John does not describe the new creation to satisfy our curiosity about the future, but to comfort, assure, encourage and strengthen all believers.

**DISCUSSION** Do you think that we are living in a similar cultural reality of decadence, violence, and moral decline? If so, what are some specific examples, and how can these words bring comfort, assurance, and encouragement into this discussion?

Jesus also promises that he will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life, to all who are thirsty. This may mean nothing more than the fact that those who have been victorious (remember the theme of victory in the seven letters?) will be refreshed and rewarded for their faithfulness. It is also possible that this water is the same water described in 22:1 symbolizing eternal life. Jesus had told the Samaritan woman: "People soon become thirsty again after drinking this water. But the water I give them takes away thirst altogether. It becomes a perpetual spring within them, giving them eternal life" (John 4:13-14). In Isaiah 55:1 and 58:11, Jeremiah 2:13, Ezekiel 47:1-10 and Joel 3:18, water is pictured as salvation, and God's gracious offer is to anyone who thirsts.

**DISCUSSION** What makes you more thirsty for the water of life?

Those who overcome (who do not compromise with the Roman culture and the cult of Caesar) will inherit this new creation. The list of sinners, those who will not inherit the Kingdom but will be thrown into the lake of fire, is not meant to be a kind of checklist against which we can screen others. The truth is, we don't have to scratch very deeply to discover that we are all on the list to one degree or another. The deeper purpose of this list is to reinforce our dependence upon the forgiveness and grace of Jesus to make us worthy to inherit the Kingdom.

**DISCUSSION** Do you see yourself in this list anywhere?

## GOING DEEPER: BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

Steven Covey is credited with coining the phrase, "always begin with the end in mind." This passage paints a vivid picture of the "end" to which God is bringing all creation. While we could merely sit on our hands and wait for the fulfillment of this vision, that would ignore the call of the gospel. The gospel announces that the Kingdom of God is at hand, and we are invited and empowered to bring that Kingdom to light in this world, now. The vision that John paints merely sets the trajectory of our daily life. We are called to live in such a way that the thirsty are refreshed, the broken are made whole, the grieving are comforted and the hopeless are sustained with real hope. We are graciously included in the work of making all things new.

**DISCUSSION** Does this picture of our future illuminate how we should live each day differently? In what specific ways can we be part of making all things new?

## Application

God calls us to daily surrender to the Spirit of God working in and through us, and to proclaim God's victory over all things by giving generously of our time, skills, experiences and financial resources.

**DISCUSSION** Name one way you will give generously of your time, your skill, your experience or your financial resources this week. How will this be part of "making all things new"?

## PRAY TOGETHER

You are our God, and you wash away our pain and sorrow in the waves of your mercy. Your good news for us today is that you overcame sin and death by destroying it, and you usher in a new creation in which evil, pain, suffering, injustice, heartache and oppression have no place. We will never lose hope because we know how your story ends. Amen.

## ADDITIONAL CONVERSATION AND REFLECTION

### *Be At Peace*

#### REVELATION 19:6

Beasts and bowls of wrath. Demons and plagues. Fire and terror. Chaos and woe. The images in the chapters we've read this week from Revelation seem straight out of a horror movie. But these images were not meant to frighten those who first read them. Instead, these images were meant to mirror the challenges of the world in which they lived, and, from that perspective, we can relate to them. We, too, live in a world that is filled with pain, sorrow and terror. But these images are not the last word. They are merely the backdrop to the core message of Revelation: God wins, and since we belong to God, we win, too! Revelation 19:6 reminds us that God reigns, even when our current circumstances tempt us to doubt. No matter how difficult or desperate your circumstances are today, remember: in Christ, ultimately the victory over sin and death is ours!

Revelation 21:1-8 NLT Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. (2) And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. (3) I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. (4) He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." (5) And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!" And then he said to me, "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true." (6) And he also said, "It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. (7) All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children. (8) "But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."



# Daily Walk on the Rock

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## Monday

### REVELATION 21:1-14

Describe one of the most beautiful places you have ever seen. How does it compare with the description of the holy city in these verses? Will the new world be on the existing earth (see Romans 8:18-21 and 2 Peter 3:7-13)? Who will be the residents of this holy city? Imagine living without fear, pain or death! How do you feel about this place that Jesus has prepared for you? Think about how that promise changes your lifestyle now. How would you sum up the central truth of this book?

## Tuesday

### REVELATION 21:15-27

What is the significance of the foundations and the gates? How big is the city? Compare it to the related vision in Ezekiel 40:2, 40:5, and 48:30-35. Considering the world in which John’s readers live, and the conditions they are under, what is especially impressive about this city? Think about when you’ve needed the vision and promise of the holy city. Has studying Revelation enhanced your view of the Bible? What do you hope to carry with you from this study of Revelation?

## Wednesday

### REVELATION 22

What words of Christ are repeated three times in this chapter (7, 12, and 20)? Read 22:12-17. How is the final state of humanity determined? Is it ever too late for people to change their ways and come to Christ? Why or why not? Think about the second coming of Christ. How is your lifestyle in keeping with verse 7? Have your perceptions of Jesus, Satan, heaven and hell changed as you’ve studied Revelation? How? Will these new perceptions affect how you live, how you worship, and how you serve? Spend time in prayer asking God to give you clarity in your understanding Revelation, and wisdom and strength to change anything that needs to be changed in your life.

## Thursday

### JOHN 1

In this Gospel, John wants us to understand that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. John shows Jesus as fully human and also fully God. What do we learn about the Word in 1-5 and 10-18? What is the Word (see Psalm 33:6, Hosea 4:1 and Psalm 119:11)? To John, understanding this new meaning of the Word is the beginning of understanding the good news of Jesus Christ! Does knowing that God created the entire universe help you understand that, since God

created you, nothing will ever happen to you that is too difficult for God? We, like John the Baptist, are here to reflect God’s love and light. Are God’s love and light showing through you to others?

## Friday

### JOHN 2

Verses 13-24 describe Jesus clearing the temple. The sellers and moneychangers are set up to provide sacrificial animals for those coming from far away. But this well-meaning custom had become a scam, and the money changers charge exorbitant exchange rates. Jesus is very angry about this. What else might Jesus be angry about (see Psalm 69:9)? How is Jesus challenged in verse 18, and what effect does his response have? Are there rooms in your spiritual house that Jesus would want to have cleaned up? Think about where changes need to be made in your life. Spend some time in prayer.

## Saturday

### JOHN 3

Nicodemus is a Pharisee, but he is searching for answers. He believes Jesus has them. What is significant about Nicodemus coming to Jesus? Why does he visit at night (19-20)? What point does Jesus make when he compares spiritual birth to the wind (8)? How does Jesus account for Nicodemus’ lack of understanding (10)? What does Jesus claim about himself (13-15)? Think about what verses 16-18 say about God, and what God wants us to do. How will belief show itself, according to 15-21? Consider where you are right now in the birthing of your spiritual life. Belief is more than an intellectual agreement that Jesus is God. It is putting our trust and our confidence in God, and putting God in charge of our lives, our present plans and our eternal destiny. It is saying with all our hearts: “Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me!”

## Sunday

### PSALM 127

This psalm tells us that a life without God is senseless! God must be the foundation for everything. What does Solomon say about work done without the Lord? Is God building all of the parts of your life, all of your endeavors? Are you worn out, or invigorated, as you are being led by God? This day, this week, make God your highest priority, and let God do your building!