



SESSION 6

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

▶ ***The Point***

One day we will fully experience who God created us to be.

▶ ***The Passage***

Revelation 21:1-8

▶ ***The Bible Meets Life***

Over the course of my adult life, I've owned five houses. Each move to another house represented a change in our lives: a shift in ministry or relocation to a new city. With each move, my family started fresh with schools, church families, and even finding the best Mexican food in town. While it was sad to leave a house we liked and say goodbye to good friends, we also experienced the thrill of a new chapter in our lives. Each new chapter, though, was not without its challenges. Health issues arose. Key relationships went through unexpected changes. Friends and family died. Each new place we lived included an ebb and flow to life that wasn't always idyllic.

I am thankful this world is not my real home. The closing chapters of the Book of Revelation show us that God provides a permanent home where He will live with us forever. The far-from-idyllic ebb and flow of life on earth will be absent—as will be the presence of sin and death. Our final, new home will be perfect.

▶ ***The Setting***

One day Christ will return to earth for His people and He will engage in a final battle with the enemies of God. Following the Lord's decisive victory in the end times, His people will live with Him forever in His presence. This will come about in a new heaven and a new earth—an ideal place where sin is absent and everything is perfect. Those who have a relationship of faith with God through Jesus Christ will fully experience who He created them to be.

What does the Bible say?

The Alpha and the Omega (v. 6)—In the Greek alphabet, *alpha* is the first letter while *omega* is the last letter. This title of God emphasizes completion—from beginning to end.

The lake that burns with fire and sulfur (v. 8)—A place of eternal torment (see Rev. 20:10), Jesus noted it was originally “prepared for the devil and his angels”—the enemies of God (Matt. 25:41).

The second death (v. 8)—This spiritual death is marked by eternal punishment and separation from God. It is experienced by those who reject God’s offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Revelation 21:1-8

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 I also saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband.

³ Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God’s dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God.

⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away.

⁵ Then the one seated on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new.” He also said, “Write, because these words are faithful and true.”

⁶ Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will freely give to the thirsty from the spring of the water of life.

⁷ The one who conquers will inherit these things, and I will be his God, and he will be my son.

⁸ But the cowards, faithless, detestable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars—their share will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

Revelation 21:1-3 Commentary

[Verse 1] Throughout history most humans have not experienced what God originally intended—perfect fellowship with Him in His presence. Revelation 21 opens with a picture of the restoration of this fellowship. John witnessed **a new heaven and a new earth**. God cursed the earth because of the first humans' sin. (See Gen. 3:17.) The Jewish people had long been anticipating this new creation. (See Isa. 65:17; 66:22).

At God's great white throne judgment both earth and heaven "fled from his presence" (Rev. 20:11). John reemphasized that **the first heaven and the first earth had passed away**. The apostle Peter had noted this world was temporary; both heaven and earth would be destroyed by fire. (See 2 Pet. 3:10-11.) Jesus Himself affirmed, "Heaven and earth will pass away" (Matt. 24:35). Paul noted that all creation has been "subjected to futility" (Rom. 8:20)—it was in bondage to sin and suffered from decay and corruption. Thus it has been eagerly anticipating the day when it would be released from bondage and would be completely remade (vv. 19-21), perfectly fashioned by God to fulfill His original intention. Apparently everything had been so corrupted by sin that it needed to be destroyed. This was not annihilation (total extinction) but rather the beginning of a radical transformation.

The mention of **heaven** in this verse does not refer to the dwelling of God, which is a place of perfection and has no need for renewal. (See Heb. 8:1; 9:24.) Instead, the reference is most likely to everything above the earth that we call the heavens—clouds, sky, atmosphere, and celestial bodies.

The Jews viewed the **sea** as powerful, unpredictable, and dangerous. While biblical scholars have debated the meaning of John's reference to the sea, on the new earth the sea would no longer exist.

[Verse 2] Often referred to as the **holy city** (see Isa. 52:1; Matt. 4:5; 27:53), the Jews considered **Jerusalem** great and glorious. However, its magnificence came to an end in AD 70 when much of the city was destroyed by the Roman legions following a Jewish revolt.

In his vision John saw a **new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God**. Rather than one that had been designed and built by humans, this new, perfect city was fashioned by the Lord Himself and sent down from Him to be a part of the earth He had renewed. It was **prepared like a bride adorned for her husband**.

[Verse 3] John used relational language to highlight the new Jerusalem God had prepared and given to His people. Then the apostle expanded on this relationship as he shared the incredible words he heard from **the throne**. The **loud voice** brought attention to a very important announcement: **"God's dwelling is with humanity."**

Jesus promised He was going away "to prepare a place" for His people and would "come again . . . so that where I am you may be also" (John 14:2-3). John witnessed the culmination of Jesus' promise, which was foretold by Ezekiel (see Ezek. 37:27) and echoed by the writer of Hebrews (see Heb. 11:16)—God will forever **live with** everyone who has been made right with Him through faith in Jesus Christ.

Revelation 21:4-5 Commentary

[Verse 4] The garden of Eden was the perfect home God originally designed for humanity. While that was only a temporary place for the first humans, God has prepared another perfect place for His people where we will live with Him for eternity.

Interpreters have varying opinions on the meaning of **He will wipe away every tear from their eyes**. Some suggest this grief is from such experiences as the loss of loved ones, the pain of broken lives and broken relationships. Others suggest the tears are not from loss and regret, but rather from the pain and sacrifices experienced for being faithful to Christ in the world. Perhaps such tears encompass both meanings and more.

Because of the reality of sin in this world none of us have escaped its consequences, which include **grief, crying, and pain**. Of course, the ultimate penalty of sin is **death**, the judgment God warned against in Genesis 2:17. We have experienced heartache, suffering, and loss because of rebellion, disease, cruelty, and more. While a relationship with Jesus gives us peace, strength, and hope in the midst of our circumstances, nothing can compare to the reality we will experience in God's kingdom.

None of these negative experiences of humanity will exist any longer, because **the previous things have passed away**. Our present earth and all the pains and hardships of this life will one day pass away. In their place will be a new dwelling to live in and a new way of living, both of which will be perfect. We will experience life as God originally intended it, just as Isaiah prophesied. (See Isa. 25:8; 35:10.)

[Verse 5] John saw a vision of **the one seated on the throne**. John had earlier seen a similar vision (see Rev. 4:2) after he was invited to witness the things that were to come as part of God's divine plan. It is not stated whether the One seated on the throne is God the Father or God the Son. However, in Revelation 1:4-5 John distinguished between Jesus Christ and "the one who is, who was, and who is to come" who sits on the throne. The same language is used in Revelation 4:8-9 by the four living creatures as they praise the One seated on the throne. However, in Revelation 5:6, Jesus Christ, the Lamb, stands in the midst of the throne. Whether the reference is to God the Father or God the Son in Revelation 21:5, the throne represents God's sovereignty and majestic glory.

Since only God is Creator, only He can create on the scale described here. Perhaps His words in this verse were intended to confirm the previous vision John had seen. On the other hand, God may have spoken them simply to emphasize His own care and concern for the redeemed of humanity, which is seen in His actions described throughout this chapter. Regardless of why He spoke, the Lord emphasized, **"Look, I am making everything new."** This was always God's plan and intention, and it is what He will do.

The Lord emphasized, **"These words are faithful and true."** These were not simply the words of an angel—a messenger—but were instead the very words of God Himself. Whether spoken to persecuted believers or to those who aren't experiencing trouble at the moment, God's words are always genuine and dependable.

Revelation 21:6-8 Commentary

[Verse 6] God declared, **“It is done!”** The emphasis is on the events John had already witnessed and the words God had already spoken—they were completed or fulfilled. God’s plan is accomplished!

God is **“the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.”** The phrases are synonymous since in the Greek alphabet the beginning letter is *alpha* while the ending letter is *omega*. This is a reminder that God completes what He starts. Furthermore, God was present in the beginning before He created anything, and He is the end, the purpose for which all things were created.⁴

Water is used throughout the Bible in reference to spiritual life, which comes only through a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. God described Himself as “the fountain of living water” (Jer. 2:13) and God invited those who were thirsty to freely drink from the “water” He provides (Isa. 55:1). Jesus emphasized the spiritual need of humanity when He spoke of the “living water” (John 4:10) that brings “eternal life” (v. 14). Jesus later declared, “no one who believes in me will ever be thirsty again” (6:35), a reminder that our deepest need can only be met through Him.

God **freely** offers this gift of **water** to anyone who is **thirsty**. While the redeemed have already partaken of the living water freely offered by Jesus, **the spring of the water of life** pictures a never-ending satisfaction. This will be experienced by all who live with God in the New Jerusalem (see Rev. 21:9-27) as a result of their relationship with Jesus Christ.

[Verse 7] Jesus noted that He is the ultimate Victor who has “conquered the world” (John 16:33). He has overcome all the evil powers that stand opposed to God’s plan. Believers share in Jesus’ victory, having overcome the world through their faith in Jesus as the Son of God. (See 1 John 5:4-5.) As we persevere in our faith and demonstrate it through our obedience and good works we will **inherit** and forever enjoy all the blessings and benefits (**these things**) noted previously in this chapter.

The greatest blessing is the reality of living forever with **God** in a relationship of Father and child. Through faith in Christ we have been adopted into His family and have become “coheirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17), so our inheritance includes all that belongs to Christ, our older brother. (See Heb. 2:11.)

[Verse 8] God issues a warning that presents a great contrast to what His children will experience for eternity. He calls attention to the destiny of those who are **cowards, faithless, detestable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars**. This is not an exhaustive list but rather a representation of those who ignored God’s commands but more importantly rejected His grace—the salvation He offers freely to every kind of sinner through faith in Jesus Christ.

Whereas most people will experience physical death because of the reality of sin, those who have rejected God’s salvation will also experience **the second death**. Unlike the redeemed who will experience the glories of eternal life, those who have rejected God will **share** only in eternal death **in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur**, where, as Jesus noted, “the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:48).



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 60 of the PSG. Encourage them to pray and share the following this week:



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Pray a prayer of thanksgiving.** If you are a believer, take a moment to thank the Lord for placing you in His “forever family.” Thank Him for the grace that saved you.
- ▶ **Pray a prayer of salvation.** If you are unsure if you are going to heaven, talk to your group leader or check out the inside front cover of this book. God desires to make things “new” in your life through His forgiveness and grace.
- ▶ **Share Christ with a friend or family member.** Set a time to share the gospel with someone you believe is far from God. Help them understand that Jesus loves them, died for them, and is willing to save them from the penalty of sin.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 60 of the PSG:

Of the five houses I’ve lived in, the one I currently reside in is my favorite, by far. But I will gladly give it up when God brings me into my new, permanent home with Him.

PRAY: Conclude by praising God for the glories of eternity. Thank Him for granting us the privilege of living with Him in that special place. Ask Him for the wisdom and courage to help others join us there.

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

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IT'S TIME TO START A NEW GROUP WHEN ...

BY KEN BRADDY

If a church is not intentional about starting new groups, it will soon find itself in trouble. For every new group you start, you can figure you'll increase average attendance by approximately 10 people. From my experience, you know it's time to start a new group when...

A group has been together for at least two years. It's really hard for guests to break into new groups when they have been together for longer than 24 months. Members have formed relationships and shared life with one another. By the time a group approaches its second birthday, it's time to consider starting a new group as different members approach new seasons of life.

A group doesn't see a steady stream of guests. It's true; groups "cool off" after a time and will often turn inward. Sunday mornings become "all about them," not about people who don't yet know Christ. But if you can recruit people to leave the group and start a new one, it's almost guaranteed they will reach more people for Christ and demonstrate an excitement for Kingdom growth the mother group hasn't known in years. Who knows, maybe that excitement will rub off and inspire the mother group to move to new heights of evangelism.

A group has ceased to grow. When a group no longer adds people to its ministry roll, it's time to start a new group. The group may have done a good job in the past of reaching new people, but over time the growth may have slacked off. It's possible that the influx of newer group members has frustrated the charter members of the group, and therefore they have become resistant to reaching any more new people.

A group fills their meeting space beyond 80 percent of capacity. The 80/20 rule is real; it simply states that groups will struggle to grow beyond 80 percent of their meeting room's capacity. When a group exceeds 80 percent of its seating capacity, the room is visually full to guests. A group can certainly exceed 80 percent of its seating capacity, but if this continues the attendance rate is likely to drop. People like elbow room, so think about square footage standards that recommend adults each have 15 square feet of space. A group that averages 15 adults needs at least 225 square feet of space.

The fall season comes around. Most churches experience a boost in Bible study attendance every fall. It normally begins in August with the onset of school, as people begin settling into routines again after a summer of rest and relaxation. August/September is a great time to launch new groups. If a church was averaging 150 people in Sunday School and started one new group in its preschool, children, student, and adult ministries, it should grow by 40 people. Within one year, it will average 190 people (new groups tend to add 10 people on average). The hardest part is to be intentional every year and have a game plan to start new groups.

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