

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 70** and ask **Question #1: What do you like best about a fresh start?**

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life** on **PSG page 71**, to the author's experience of owning five different houses in his adult life. Encourage group members to share their experiences of living in different houses.

SAY: "Today, believers live with the hope of a heavenly home, a perfect place created for us by God."

Reinforce **The Point** on **PSG page 71: One day we will fully experience who God created us to be.**

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Thank God for His promises of eternal life in His presence forever.

SESSION 6

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?



The Point

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

The Bible Meets Life

None of us has an idyllic life. Health issues, disappointing relationships, and stumbling blocks in a world full of sin and insecurity pull us down.

Thankfully though, this world is

not all there is. The closing chapters of the Book of Revelation show us God provides a permanent home where He will dwell with those in His family. It is a home with no health issues, no insecurities, and no sin. In Christ, we are promised the perfect home with Him.

The Passage

Revelation 21:1-8

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.

Revelation 21:1-3

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.

Verse 1. Throughout history humans have not experienced what God originally intended—perfect fellowship with Him in His presence. The first humans lived like this for a time in the garden of Eden, but after they sinned by disobeying God's command not to eat of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:1-24), the relationship between God and humans was broken. In His perfect timing and according to His perfect will, God made possible a restored relationship with humans. Those who trust Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord become God's children (Gal. 3:26; 4:4-7). Because sin is a present reality and the enemies of God are active in this world, God's people cannot at this present time experience the fullness of their salvation. God's ultimate plan, however, is to bring an end to sin and judge His enemies, and then to fulfill His original intention for humanity—living in His presence forever.

Revelation 21 opens with a picture of this perfect, future reality. The apostle John, who had been given a vision of the end times, had just finished describing the ultimate and final battle that would take place between the Lord Jesus Christ and the enemies of God (Rev. 20:7-10), along with the judgment of the dead at the great white throne (vv. 11-15). What John saw next stood in profound contrast to the death and destruction he had previously envisioned.

1 ▶ John witnessed **a new heaven and a new earth.** About eight centuries earlier Isaiah had prophesied God's promise of creating a "new heaven and a new earth" (Isa. 65:17; see also 66:22). Thus the Jewish people had long been anticipating this new creation. The Greek word used

STUDY THE BIBLE Revelation 21:1-3



10 minutes

SUMMARIZE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 72.

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Revelation 21:1-3.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Say, "The topic of heaven often occupies our thoughts in this season of life and especially when someone we love passes away." Encourage group members to share favorite hymns or songs about heaven. Be prepared to play the song "I Can Only Imagine" by MercyMe. Go to BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra and click on the Leader Extra for today's session for a link to the song on YouTube®. Ask group members to listen to the song and record phrases that are meaningful to them. Have group members share their responses. Remind group members that heaven is real. Knowing that God has prepared a place for us for eternity should impact the way we live now.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG pages 72-73**, to the bullet points that describe what John saw in his vision recorded in Revelation 21:

- *A new heaven and a new earth.*
- *No more sea.*
- *The new Jerusalem.*
- *A new way of life.*

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** on page 73 and this page to provide further background information about the **new heaven and a new earth**.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 2** to give more details about Jerusalem and **the new Jerusalem**.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 3** to point out the significance of the promise and hope that **God's dwelling is with humanity** in the new heaven and new earth.

here for **new** refers to something fresh and emphasizes its higher quality. God cursed the earth because of the first humans' sin (Gen. 3:17). Paul noted it has been "subjected to futility" (Rom. 8:20) since that time 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.

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**. Peter noted this world was temporary; both heaven and earth would be destroyed by fire (2 Pet. 3:10-11). Jesus Himself affirmed, "Heaven and earth will pass away" (Matt. 24:35). 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 purging of everything wicked and destructive from the entire cosmos gives rise to the new heaven and the new earth, in which righteousness will dwell."¹

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—although God is not confined to a particular place). Instead, the reference is most likely to everything above the earth that we call the heavens—clouds, sky, atmosphere, and celestial bodies.

While the **sea** has long been a source of food, to the Jews it was powerful, unpredictable, and dangerous. It also served as a barrier between people. While biblical scholars have debated the meaning of John's reference to the sea, on the new earth the sea would no longer exist. ◀

2 ▶ Verse 2. Jerusalem had existed as a city long before King David captured it and made it the center of the Jewish religion. Often referred to as the **holy city** (Isa. 52:1; Matt. 4:5; 27:53), the Jews considered it great and glorious. It was not the perfect habitation, however, as it required walls and watchmen to protect the people in it. Its magnificence came to an end in AD 70 when much of the city was destroyed by the Roman legions following a Jewish revolt against Roman rule.

In his vision John saw **the 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. Again the Greek word for *new* describes something superior to the original. Note the vivid imagery John used to describe the city—it was **prepared like a bride adorned for her husband**. Even in our modern era most of us are moved by the radiance of a bride, who has spent much time in preparation, as she is escorted down the aisle to her waiting groom for the marriage ceremony. ◀

3 ▶ 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**. The Greek word for **dwelling** (*skene*) refers to a tent or tabernacle. When translating from Hebrew to Greek, it is often used in reference to the Hebrew term *mishkan* (“tent”), which is derived from *shakan* (meaning “to dwell”), and is the basis for the word *Shekinah*—God’s glorious presence.²

Jesus promised He was going away “to prepare a place” for His people and He 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: “My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people” (Ezek. 37:27). This was echoed by the writer of Hebrews (Heb. 11:16)—God will forever **live with** those who have been made right with Him through faith in Jesus Christ. **His peoples** reflects the diverse background of those who have been redeemed. ◀

Revelation 21:4-5

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.”

4 ▶ 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

DISCUSS: Question #2
(PSG, p. 73): **What do you think most people believe about heaven?**

(Alternate: What part of the description of heaven in verses 1-3 are you most looking forward to?)

TRANSITION: “In the next verses we will see how things will be different in heaven.”

STUDY THE BIBLE

Revelation 21:4-5



10 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Revelation 21:4-5.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 4** on this page and page 76 to provide more insight into these phrases:

- *He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*
- *Death will be no more.*
- *Grief, crying, and pain will be no more.*
- *The previous things have passed away.*

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 74**, to the these words: “Thankfully, sadness will end one day. ‘Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more.’ Let that sink in. No more death! No more grief! No more crying! No more pain! The thought of this is overwhelming.”

- *If you feel the pain of the loss of a loved one, hold on.*
- *If you are fighting a disease that causes your body constant pain or difficulty, hold on.*
- *If you have been a victim of a crime, hold on.*
- *If others have treated you poorly, hold on.*

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 5** to provide more insight into these phrases:

- *The one seated on the throne.*
- *Look, I am making everything new.*
- *These words are faithful and true.*

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**.

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 life’s circumstances, nothing can compare to the reality we will experience in God’s eternal 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 (Isa. 25:8; 35:10). ◀

5 ▶ Verse 5. John saw a vision of **the one seated on the throne**. John had earlier seen a similar vision (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.

This is only the second time in the Book of Revelation (after Rev. 1:8) where the Lord Himself is noted as speaking. He may have addressed John directly or He may have been speaking to all those who read and hear the words—persecuted believers in the first century as well as believers in the twenty-first century.

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.

God then instructed John to **write**. This was the same command he had been given eleven times previously in the Book of Revelation. Perhaps John had been overwhelmed at witnessing the majesty of God and stopped writing; thus, he needed to be reminded again to keep at it. 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

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.”

KEY WORDS: 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 (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.

DISCUSS: Question #3
(PSG, p. 75): **How can these verses provide comfort in times of uncertainty?**

(Alternate: What part of this description of heaven in verses 4-5 are you most looking forward to?)

DO: Encourage group members to share responses to the activity “Heaven” on PSG page 78.

TRANSITION: “In the next verses we will see words of hope for the faithful and the consequences that come to the unfaithful.”

STUDY THE BIBLE Revelation 21:6-8



15 minutes

READ: Read Revelation 21:6-8.

GUIDE: Refer group members to common responses people give to the question: “If you died today, why would God let you into heaven?” (PSG, p. 76).

- “I suppose He’d let me in because I’ve done some good things in my life.”
- “I never killed anyone, I paid my taxes, and I went to church.”
- “God lets everybody in.”

Only one answer is correct:

- “I’ve placed my faith and trust in Jesus as my Savior.”

GUIDE: Use **KEY WORDS** on page 77 (PSG, p. 76) to explain the phrase *The Alpha and the Omega*.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary** 6 on this page and page 79 to provide further explanation to the phrase *The Alpha and the Omega* and to the gift of water God freely offers to anyone who is thirsty.

Verse 6. Throughout history people have sought to create a utopian society—some type of paradise on earth. These efforts have always failed, because the earth itself is cursed due to sin and sinful humanity is unable to create anything that is flawless. What humans are unable to do, however, God will accomplish. He will create the perfect, permanent habitation for humanity but it will only be available to those who have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

6 ▶ God continued speaking to John and announced, “**It is done!**” The emphasis is on the events John has already witnessed and the words God had already spoken—they are completed or fulfilled. This includes the final judgment of the wicked as well as everything the righteous will experience. God’s plan is accomplished!

God declared Himself to be “**the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.**” He had previously used this title (Rev. 1:8) and would emphasize it again (22:13). The phrases are synonymous since in the Greek alphabet the beginning letter is *alpha* while the ending letter is *omega* to emphasize the totality of a topic. This designation is a reminder that God completes what He starts. He created everything according to His plan and He will bring it to fulfillment according to His plan. Furthermore, God was present in the beginning before He created anything, and He is the end, the purpose for which all things were created.³

On earth water is a universal need—its presence or absence can spell the difference between life and death. To find a source of water in an arid climate was considered a blessing from God. Since everyone understands the importance of water in a physical sense, it is natural that water is used throughout the Bible in reference to spiritual life. In the Old Testament 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). To the woman at the well 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.

One of God’s final promises in the Book of Revelation emphasizes this gift of water He **freely** offers to anyone who is **thirsty**. The word *freely* points to the grace that continues to be extended by God. 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 (Rev. 21:9-27) as a result of their relationship with Jesus Christ. ◀

Verse 7. Victory is a common theme throughout John’s writings—the Greek word here translated **conquers** appears six times in 1 John and seventeen times in Revelation. Jesus noted He is the ultimate Victor who has “conquered the world” (John 16:33). John emphasized that we have overcome the world through our faith in Jesus as the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5). As we persevere in our faith we will **inherit** and forever enjoy all the blessings and benefits (**these things**) noted previously in this chapter. The greatest blessing, however, 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 (Heb. 2:11).

7▶ **Verse 8.** God issues one final warning in the Book of Revelation that presents a great contrast to what His children will experience for eternity. He calls attention to the ultimate 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 general representation of those who ignored and despised God’s commands but more importantly rejected His grace—the salvation He offers freely to every sinner through faith in Jesus Christ. Those who practice such deeds show they were never redeemed. All the actions noted in this list stand in marked opposition to what God desires for humans: boldness—especially in the face of persecution; trust—faith and confidence in Him; purity—not being polluted by the world; loving and building up other people; virtue—living within God’s standards of blessing; faithfulness—calling on and trusting only in the one true God; honesty—knowing and promoting truth.

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). ◀

1. Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, vol. 39 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 361–62.

2. *Ibid.*, 363–64.

3. *Ibid.*, 365–66.

GUIDE: Refer members to the following bullet points on **PSG page 77** to summarize this section:

- *God freely gives salvation to those who ask.*
- *Those who are saved belong to God’s family.*
- *The unrepentant will not live in heaven.*

DISCUSS: Question #4 (PSG, p. 77): **How do these promises reflect God’s character?**

GUIDE: Use **KEY WORDS** on page 77 (PSG, p. 76) to explain *the lake that burns with fire and sulfur* and *the second death*.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 7** to show God’s clear words of judgment against the unfaithful.

DISCUSS: Question #5 (PSG, p. 78): **What can we say for certain about eternity based on this passage?**

(Alternate: How does this passage summarize your understanding of this study: “Why Are We Here?”)

LIVE IT OUT



5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point: One day we will fully experience who God created us to be.**

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 79)**; (see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

GUIDE: Encourage group members to consider how their beliefs about heaven and eternal life impact their daily living.

PRAY: "Father, thank You for the promise of eternal life in heaven for those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. Help us to be mindful of those who have yet to believe and to look for opportunities to share our faith and hope with them."

LIVE IT OUT

A day is coming when we will experience all God created us to be. We'll live in a sinless, perfect place with God as our Father. How will that truth impact your life this week?

- ▶ **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 whether or not God would let you into heaven, your group leader or pastor can help you find assurance of salvation. Talk to a Christian about your need for salvation. The inside front cover of this book can help.
- ▶ **Share Christ with a lost 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 will save them from the penalty of sin if they place their faith in Him.

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



BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR



Fragment of Revelation 3:12–4:12; dates to the 4th century.

Early in revelation, John reported God’s self-declaration: “I am the Alpha and the Omega” (Rev. 1:8). This assertion appears again in Revelation 21:6 and 22:13. The declaration’s strategic placement at the beginning and end of Revelation reflects the majesty of the God who is the beginning, end, and everything in between.

Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. God, speaking in the first person, helped define what He meant by adding “the Beginning and the End” (21:6). In the final use of the phrase, Jesus added of Himself: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”

The Old Testament provides critical insight for understanding what the Lord meant with the self-

identification “The Alpha and the Omega.” All three instances in Revelation begin with the Lord’s words of self-identification from Exodus 3:14: “I AM.” This is the language God used to identify Himself to Moses: “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.” God’s declaration “I AM” indicated something of God’s absolute existence. This emphasized both that God exists and that He is the liberator God who is present with His people. For the apostle John, the connection was clear; this God who brought Pharaoh to his knees and set His people free in the days of Moses was the same God who would not fail His people in their oppression under the Roman Empire.

Additionally, the prophet Isaiah reported the words of Yahweh: “Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, Yahweh, am the first, and with the last, I am He” (Isa. 41:4). In Isaiah 43:10, the Lord declared: “No god was formed before Me, and there will be none after Me.” And in Isaiah 44:6: “This is what the Lord, the King of Israel and its redeemer, the Lord of Hosts, says: ‘I am the first and I am the last. There is no God but Me.’” The Isaiah passages declare that God alone created all that exists and He alone stands as the sovereign Lord of time and history. Babylon had its gods fashioned by human hands—but Yahweh alone is the absolute, incomparable God over all the nations.

The excerpt above is from the article “Alpha and Omega” (Summer 2015), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.



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