

Study 3. A New Beginning Rev 21-22

The final two chapters of Revelation bring John's account of his vision to a close - along with the unfolding story of the whole bible. It's a remarkably fitting conclusion to the story of God's dealings with creation, which has unfolded from the first pages of Genesis.

In this study we'll look back to the Old Testament for a glimpse of the story that closes so fittingly in the final pages of the bible - a useful summary of the Bible's "Big Picture."

First things First

Read Genesis 2:4-17, for a description of the creation of "the heavens and the earth."

a) Look back at Genesis 1:31. How does God describe his creation?

b) God takes Adam, the man he has formed, and places him in Eden, the perfect garden. (2:8.) What are the two most notable trees in the garden?

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c) A gushing river flows from the garden, giving life and fertility to all around. All is good - and God and man are in perfect harmony. There's only one limitation. What is it? (v16-17)

What do you think this "tree" represents?

According to God, what will the consequences be of eating this fruit?

In Genesis 3:4, Satan promises more positive results from eating this fruit. What?

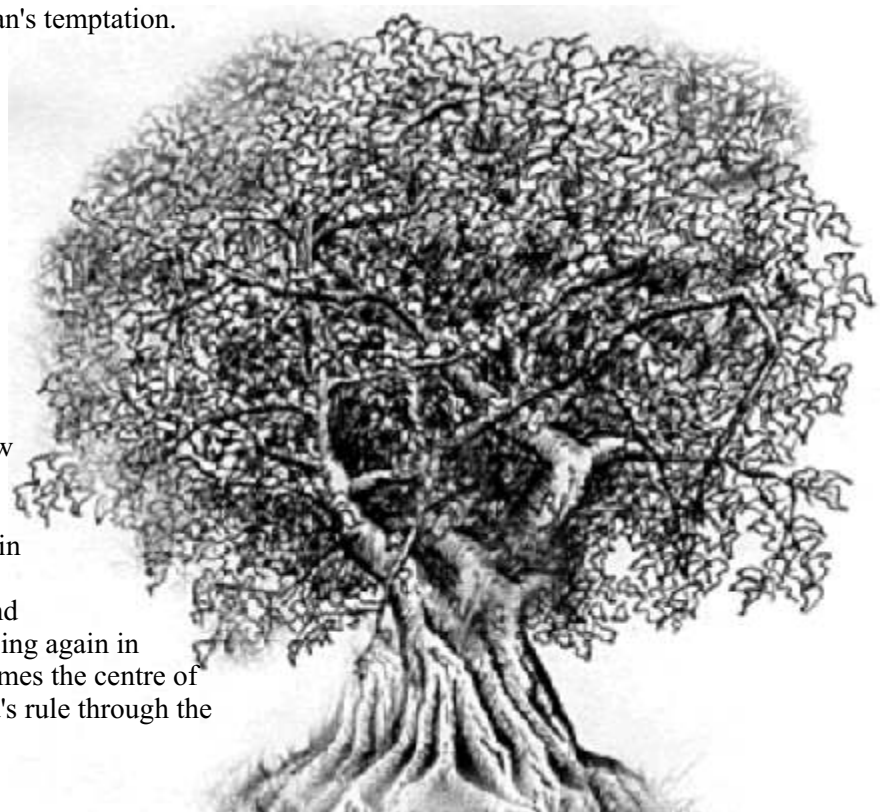
Read Genesis 3:6-19 to see the outcome of Satan's temptation.

What is the consequence in 3:17?

What is the consequence in 3:22-24?

Because Adam and Eve rebel against God's rightful rule, and decide to be the ones to determine right and wrong for themselves, the earth is **cursed**; work is hard, and the good creation is now opposed to man's efforts to subdue it. Worse, access to the **tree of life** is now barred!

As the story of the Bible unfolds, the curse of sin and death spreads. But God steps in to bring blessing again - he takes one man, Abraham, and creates the nation Israel, who enjoy God's blessing again in the Promised Land. The city of Jerusalem becomes the centre of God's promised blessing, and the centre of God's rule through the great King David and his descendants.



But history repeats itself. Ignoring God's laws, the Israelites determine what's right and wrong for themselves. They bow down to idols, and righteousness is abandoned. So, just like Adam and Eve, Israel is expelled from the promised land... the final blow is the exile to Babylon, beginning in 587BC. It appears that Israel is finished.

But prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel sound a note of hope, which is echoed in Revelation 21-22.

Note briefly what is said in the following verses:

Isa 44:3, 6

Isa 51:1-3

Isa 55:1-2

Isa 65:17-19

Ezekiel 47:1, 7, 12

Ezekiel 47:7

Ezekiel 47:12

These prophets foresee a day when God will create new heavens and a new earth - with a new Jerusalem and a new temple. Their imagery pervades almost every word of Revelation 21 and 22. Sometimes it is amplified. Sometimes it is transformed. But one thing is sure... this time the blessing will be permanent!

Read Revelation 21 and 22.

a) What “new” things does John see in the first five verses?

What has happened to the world as we know it?

What is the centre-piece of this “new creation”?

b) According to the *loud voice from the throne*, what is the essence of this new creation?

c) What comfort will this immediate, face-to-face “dwelling with God” bring?

Here Comes the Bride...

d) We met the “Bride of Christ” back in chapter 19. How was she preparing herself in 19:8?

e) Linking 19:8 with 21:2, who exactly is this bride?

The “bride” is the people of God. The imagery switches from *beautiful bride* to *sparkling city* to *new Jerusalem* in 21:2... all images of the glory of God's church. Us! As Isaiah foreshadowed, the harmony of the original garden of Eden will be restored. God and man will be reconciled; there will be no more crying or pain. It's a whole new world.

Read Rev 21:9-18. The Bride/City is radiant, covered with jewels. The old Jerusalem is a shabby memory compared to the new Jerusalem which is coming down out of heaven from God.

City, River and Trees

Read Rev 21:22-22:5. Most of the imagery is lifted straight from the words of Genesis, Isaiah and Ezekiel. There's a river of life giving water. There's the tree of life... freely accessible. There's an angel with a measuring rod, just like in Ezekiel.

But there are differences. While Ezekiel saw the water of life gushing from the temple in his vision, John sees something more clearly...

f) What did Israel's temple represent, and why is it no longer needed? (21:22)

g) Most significantly, what else is absent from the city? (22:3)

We're back where we started! The Garden of Eden has become the City of God. God and his people dwell face-to-face, and the curse on creation is finally... finally... reversed.

Come Lord Jesus...

It's easy to become disappointed with this world. Things go wrong - even for the faithful. Life is a constant struggle. We still live in a world subject to the curse of frustration and death. And that will continue to be our experience, until the new creation finally comes.

Read 22:12-21.

John's vision concludes with a series of final warnings and exhortations from Jesus.

h) What do John's readers need to do to have access to the *tree of life* and the *water of life*?

i) What would prevent access to *the tree of life*? (v15, 19)

j) How well does verse 17 reflect your own attitude to the coming “new creation”?

Is it possible to be so comfortable in this life that our desire for the new creation is diminished?

Sadly, tears in this life are inevitable. How does the perspective of this study help us to be prepared for good times and bad?

All the blessings promised to Israel through the Old Testament find their fulfillment in the new creation, and the new Jerusalem. And we're freely invited to join in, simply by committing ourselves to Jesus Christ... the one who provides the water of life to all who ask.

For suffering first century Christians in the churches John writes to, the issue is simple. Persevere. Don't give up, no matter how great the pressure from the Roman Empire. This world is full of tears, but the new creation will wipe them away as we gather around the throne of the Lamb. And no matter how it seems on earth, the horrific powers of Dragon and the Beast will be overcome... simply by "the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony." (Revelation 12:11)

