



## Discussion Guide

### Eternity: Revelation 21.1-5 and 22.1-5

#### Getting Started: 10 minutes

- o If you could be the participant on a “make-over” show, which one would it be? Can you elaborate?
- o Optional: What, if anything from the sermon, encouraged, challenged, or really made you think?

**Setting the Stage:** *All that is broken will be remade. All that is amiss will come into alignment. All that is will come untrue and life will never be the same again. This is the hope we have, the hope that life will be once more what it was meant to be. Life will be. . . It seems so far off, so disconnected from our present experience. Is perception reality? Is our future glory simply that? Future? Or, is there something more, something that can be experienced today? Can the hope of the future be our hope in the present? Now that would truly be wonderful.*

**Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes** (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read Revelation 21.1-5 and 22.1-5.
- What will life be like in God’s new heaven and earth?
- What ties, if any, do you see between the life God is bringing and life as He created it in Genesis 1-3?
- What, if anything, might be significant about these ties? Can you elaborate?
- Imagine that you are sitting in one of the persecuted churches to whom John is writing. What hope does God’s statement in Revelation 21.5 give you?
- Consider the world as we know it and the world as it is described in God’s new heaven and earth. What elements of life as we know it might be changed?
- Which of these elements to be changed is most meaningful to you? Can you elaborate?
- Can you see the reality of God working in the present to bring about what will be in the future (See Rev. 21.5)? Can you elaborate on how you see God working around you? In you?
- In what ways might God be calling you to partner with Him in working for His future in the present? In your life? In the world around you?
- What will be your response? What will your response look like?

#### Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- o Prayer requests
- o Group prayer time
- o House-keeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)

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## Group Notes

### Eternity: Discussion Guide

#### Revelation 21.1-5 and 22.1-5

##### Context and Background

**The book of Revelation:** The book of Revelation is the last book of the New Testament. It was written by John to seven churches located in Asia Minor at the instruction of Jesus whom John saw in a vision (Rev. 1). The book is unlike any other book in the Bible for it consists of a mixture of genres: letter, prophecy, and apocalyptic. Perhaps the most foreign to our own modern understanding is the genre of apocalyptic. This genre was common to the Jewish experience, a literary form that often arose in times of duress. This form of writing used metaphor and wild imagery as a type of “code language” that conveyed truth to insiders and hid this same truth from outsiders, often those oppressing God’s people. The simple purpose of most Jewish apocalyptic literature was to provide hope for those being oppressed. This hope was often expressed in God achieving victory over the enemies of His people. The book of Revelation is no different. The seven churches addressed in Revelation were real churches, all in various stages of health. The letter and prophecy portions of Revelation address these real churches and their real spiritual needs. However, these seven churches shared a single reality. Their location in Asia Minor made them victims of an intense and unofficial program of persecution in the late first century, a persecution that in a few short years would win Imperial approval and sanction. The apocalyptic portions of Revelation provide hope for these suffering churches by conveying the truth that God would win victory over their enemies, in their case, Rome. However, the book of Revelation speaks in such a way that the victory of God on behalf of these seven churches is actually a victory on behalf of all of God’s people for all time. God is working to rid the world of all evil, not just Rome. This work of God is rooted in the person of Jesus and will consummate with His return. With the return of Jesus, God the Father will complete His redemptive work and will restore all of creation to the state it was meant to enjoy from the beginning. This was the hope of the ancient church in their time of trouble as well as the hope of the present church.

**Return to Eden:** The final chapters of Revelation bring the story of God’s redemptive work full circle to His work of creation. Through strong literary echoes, the book of Revelation indicates that God’s redemptive work involves not just the individual but all of creation. The point of God’s redemptive work is to restore all of creation, including people, back to His creative intentions so that they might enjoy a quality of physical and spiritual life like that seen in Genesis 1-2. Below is a chart noting some of the stronger literary ties between the conclusion of Revelation and the creation account of Genesis.

Scriptural echo	Revelation	Genesis
God living with people	Rev. 21.3	Gen. 3.8
Death	Rev. 21.4	Gen. 3.19
Tree of life	Rev. 22.2	Gen. 2.9, 3.22
Sorrow / pain	Rev. 21.4	Gen. 3.14-19
River	Rev. 22.1	Gen. 2.10
Curse	Rev. 22.3	Gen. 3.14-19
Authority / stewardship	Rev. 22.5	Gen. 1.28
God being God	Rev. 21.4	Gen. 3.5

**Connecting the dots of *The Story*:** What God intended in the beginning, He is working to bring back to reality. The final chapter is nothing other than the remaking of the first. This is *The Story* of God, the story that we find ourselves in. What was can and will be once again for those who join their own story with God’s.

##### The Text

**The hope of a new creation (Revelation 21.1-5):** In the final two chapters of Revelation, John provides a vision of the consummation of God’s redemptive activity in the person of Jesus. This activity is nothing less than a reinstating of Eden itself. John sees a new heaven and a new earth. The language of the NT can support both the ideas of something completely new and the idea of something that has been refurbished. Rather than focusing on the means God will use, John seems to focus on the quality of what he sees. The heaven and earth are of a completely different sort than what is currently experienced. However, as it is referred to as heaven and earth, it still has some resemblance to current realities. The new quality is that there is no longer any sea, a reference to the removal of evil and chaos from the world. The sea in apocalyptic literature, including Revelation, is often used to stand for the source and support of evil. With evil removed, God can once more dwell with people as He did in Eden. With God’s presence comes a reversal of life experience to life as it was meant to be; life will be free from all tragic consequences of the Fall (See *Return to Eden*). As wonderful as the hope and promise of this future reality is, the experience of God’s future work can be found in the present. God states that He is now making all things new (Rev. 21.5). One need not wait for the future, but, in the present, glimmers of a future state can now be enjoyed by those who turn to God.

**The experience of a new creation (Revelation 22.1-5):** In God’s renewed/restored creation, life will be experienced as it was meant to be. The center of life will be the throne of God. From God will come a river, a symbol of life in this context. This life available is nothing other than eternal or everlasting life. This is seen in the reference to the tree of life which was meant to provide eternal life (Gen. 2.9; 3.22). The eternal life is more than people will ever need as the fruit of this tree is abundant and constant—fruit every month. Perhaps the clearest reference to life as it was meant to be is the removal of the curse (Rev. 22.3 and Gen. 3.14-19) and the restoration of creative purpose to life once more (Rev. 22.5 and Gen.1.28). Life in God’s restored creation is nothing short of life as God meant it to be lived in Eden. One might even view this life as Eden restored.

**Application:** Life as we experience it is nothing like what God meant it to be. We experience life as something that has been shattered, something beautiful made ugly. However, the hope is that God is working to restore life to what it was meant to be. The hope is that God will one day bring all of creation full circle. One day, those that have trusted God, will find that life looks and feels like God meant it to be. They will find themselves living in Eden, with God as their life and eternity as their future. However, we do not have to wait to begin experiencing the first fruits of this future reality. Right now, God is working. That means that in the present we can begin to experience glimmers of God’s future life.