

## What Will Heaven Be Like?

### A Study of Revelation 21:1-22:5

Characteristic of Completeness: Eternity

Big Idea: God isn't going to abandon His creation; He's going to restore it.

Related Scriptures: Genesis 3:17; Isaiah 65:17; John 13:36; 14:2-3; Acts 3:21; Romans 8:18, 22-23; 1 Corinthians 15:42-58; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 2:6-7; 2 Peter 3:13

Introduction:

- A. My son, Chase, believed in Jesus at a very young age. But he wasn't too excited about the idea of heaven. In fact, heaven scared him. Chase has never been quick to accept the party line of thinking without support, so when all I could tell him was "heaven will be a lot better," he wasn't buying it. He didn't really like the idea of leaving all the things he loved on earth to go to someplace strange and unfamiliar in heaven.

Perhaps one reason Chase didn't find me very convincing is that I wasn't very convinced. For years I took it on faith that heaven would be a better place, but to be honest, I had mixed feelings about it. To be sure, the absence of suffering and the presence of the Lord sounded great, but some questions bothered me.

For example, are we going to be floating around in the clouds like some big choir, strumming harps and singing "holy, holy, holy" forever and ever? I'm sorry, but that sounds terribly boring.

Are we going to have instant and complete knowledge? If so, then to be honest, I'll really miss the joy of discovery and learning.

Will there be no time and space in heaven? If so, then I have no frame of reference to even think about it. Nothing would be familiar. And that bothers me because, although I'm looking forward to leaving some stuff behind, there's a lot to this life that I really enjoy.

Will there be no marriage in heaven? That's the best part of my life on earth right now. I don't really want to give that up. And what if I die soon and Cathy remarries a believer? When we all meet up in heaven, won't that be awkward?

Will there be streets of gold? Sounds gaudy to me. And why would we need streets?

Will there be anything to do in heaven besides worship? I don't mean to be disrespectful, but if that's all there is, I think I'm going to really miss the sense of challenge and accomplishment I get from working on other things I enjoy.

- B. Unless I miss my guess, you've had some questions about heaven, too. I think part of the problem is that there hasn't been a lot of good biblical teaching on heaven, and the vacuum has been filled with a lot of unbiblical misinformation.

Strangely, I've never received much teaching on heaven. We didn't study it much in seminary. I can't remember ever hearing a sermon dedicated to it. And so, I've operated on the assumption that the Bible doesn't have much to say about heaven. I was wrong.

You're going to hear a sermon about it today.

- C. The biblical text we're going to be studying is Revelation 21:1-22:5. It's a description of what theologians call the eternal state. It's a picture of how believers will spend eternity. It's a glimpse of what we call heaven. It is appropriate, then, that our Characteristic of Completeness for the week ► is Eternity.
- D. The text was written by the Apostle John to whom a vision of things to come was revealed by God. John has recorded for us the vision he received.

Parts of the vision are hard to understand. We're going to see that some remarkable and even bizarre images are presented, and sometimes it's difficult to know whether to take them metaphorically or literally. In fact, some parts can almost make you wonder if somebody slipped brother John the wrong kind of mushrooms for dinner and then he wrote our text while listening to "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida."

But then I remember that this is the same John that wrote the perfectly lucid gospel that bears his name, the same John that was with Jesus in His inner circle while He was on earth. And I remember that some things God has revealed to us are quite mysterious, and I've come to appreciate and even embrace the mystery. Because if I can explain everything about God, and if He always conforms to all my expectations, then I'd be very suspicious that maybe we are the ones who created Him and not the other way around.

Even though our text this morning can be hard to understand, even if we are hard-pressed to know whether to take some things symbolically or literally, the text does tell us a good deal about heaven. In fact, I'm afraid I'm only going to be scratching the surface of it today. Nevertheless, I suspect it may just revolutionize your thinking about heaven. It has mine. You may walk out of here with anticipation so stirred that it changes the way you live.

- I. John begins in ► Revelation 21:1, saying,

<sup>NKJ</sup> Revelation 21:1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. . . .

- A. The word, ► “now,” suggests what John is now describing—the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth—chronologically follows what he has presented before. And what he has presented before includes some intervening events that haven’t happened yet—things like the rapture, the tribulation, the second coming of Christ, our bodily resurrection, the thousand-year reign of Christ, the great-white-throne judgment, and the defeat of all evil, including Satan.<sup>1</sup>

My purpose is not to explain or defend these intervening events. The point is this: Strictly speaking, nobody is yet experiencing the heaven that is described in our text. The heaven described in our text will be created in the future, after some intervening events occur.

The Bible tells us that believers who have died or will die over the years do immediately enter the blissful presence of the Lord, and that certainly is heavenly.<sup>2</sup> In fact, I don’t think it’s wrong to say that believers who have died are now in heaven, but it’s a transitional or temporary heaven, an intermediate state that precedes the new heaven and new earth.<sup>3</sup> The new heaven and new earth John describes in our text have not yet been created, and this first heaven and first earth in which we now live have obviously not yet passed away.

Randy ► Alcorn, in his recent book titled, *Heaven*, explains what happens to believers when we die:

*Will we be with the Lord forever? Absolutely. Will we always be with him in exactly the same place that Heaven is now? No. . . .*

► *When we die, believers in Christ will not go to the Heaven where we’ll live forever. Instead, we’ll go to an intermediate Heaven. ► In that Heaven . . . we’ll await a time of Christ’s return to the earth, our bodily resurrection, the final judgment, and the creation of the new heavens and New Earth. ► If we fail to grasp this truth, we will fail to understand the biblical doctrine of heaven.*<sup>4</sup>

- B. Well, ► what is this new heaven and new earth?
1. First of all, the expression “heaven and earth” is a biblical designation for the entire universe.<sup>5</sup> So it seems that all of creation will somehow be new.

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<sup>1</sup> To be sure, some theologians argue that some of these events, such as the tribulation and the thousand-year reign of Christ, have already occurred or are now occurring. But no theologian I know argues that the second coming of Christ has already occurred, or that evil has already been eradicated.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:8.

<sup>3</sup> I’m not talking about the purgatory of Catholicism or the soul sleep of Jehovah’s Witnesses or Seventh Day Adventists. I don’t believe purgatory or soul sleep are biblically defensible.

<sup>4</sup> Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), 42.

<sup>5</sup> Alcorn, 155.

2. The idea of a new heaven and earth is not limited to our text.
  - a. In the Old Testament, in ► Isaiah 65:17, the Lord speaks of the future, saying,
 

<sup>NKJ</sup> Isaiah 65:17 “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.”<sup>6</sup>
  - b. Over in the New Testament, in ► 2 Peter 3:13, the Apostle Peter says,
 

<sup>NKJ</sup> 2 Peter 3:13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.
3. Back ► in our text in Revelation, the Greek term used for “new” means new “in the sense that what is old has become obsolete, and should be replaced by what is new . . . the new is, as a rule, superior in kind to the old.”<sup>7</sup> As such, appropriate synonyms for “new” could be “renewed” or “restored,” indicating something far better, but not entirely different than the old.

The implication is this: The new heaven and earth will be vastly superior, but not be entirely different than the old heaven and earth. Already we’re beginning to break the stereotype that heaven will be some totally strange and unfamiliar place. In a way, heaven will be familiar and earthly.

4. Verse 1 explains that the first heaven and earth ► will pass away. Other parts of the Bible speak of the passing in seemingly destructive terms.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, I don’t believe God will scrap His original creation completely, as though it was all a big mistake. As Alcorn explains, “He isn’t going to abandon his creation. He’s going to restore it.”<sup>9</sup>

In fact, I’m going to borrow and adapt Alcorn’s words for the big idea of my message. Here ► it is: God isn’t going to abandon His creation; He’s going to restore it.

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<sup>6</sup> From this verse, some have assumed that, in heaven, we won’t remember anything about the past. I don’t think this is necessarily true. When the Old Testament says that God will remember our sins no more, it doesn’t mean that our sins are somehow erased from His memory banks. It’s a figure of speech, meaning our past sins no longer count to Him; therefore, they won’t negatively affect His relationship with us. In the same way, we may have some memory of our past, but it will no longer count to us; therefore, it will in no way negatively affect us in heaven.

<sup>7</sup> W. Bauer, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., s.v. “καινός,” (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), hereinafter abbreviated BDAG.

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 1:11-12; 12:26-27; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 20:11.

<sup>9</sup> Alcorn, 88.

We believers are living examples of this idea. Second ► Corinthians 5:17 says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

When I became a believer in Christ, God made me a new man; the old Bob passed away. But there's a good deal of continuity between the old Bob and the new Bob. People still recognized me after I believed. My basic personality didn't change. God didn't abandon or destroy me; He restored me, and my restoration is not yet complete. So it will be with heaven and earth.

Let me provide some further ► biblical support for this idea of restoration. I'll present it in the form of a very rough chronological overview of the Bible that will take me about seven minutes to unpack.

a. Genesis ► 1:1 says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

b. In Genesis ► 1:31, God's creation—the heavens and the earth—are declared to be "very good." It doesn't seem like God would give up on something He considers "very good."

c. In ► Genesis 2, God places Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, a natural paradise full of precious minerals, flowing with clean water, teeming with wildlife, and lush with vegetation and food, including the "tree of life."

d. But, as recorded in ► Genesis 3, Adam and Eve fell into sin. As a result of the Fall, all of creation has come under a curse. God says to Adam in ► Genesis 3:17:

<sup>NKJ</sup> Genesis 3:17 . . . "Cursed *is* the ground for your sake"

e. The curse affected not just humans, but the entire creation, introducing death, decay, suffering, and estrangement. John ► Bergstrom, a Professor of Agricultural and Applied Economics at the University of Georgia who also happens to be a Christian environmentalist explains it this way:

*Nature provides beneficial services to people, but since the Fall, nature can also be the source of physical harm to people—the physical harm to people caused by tornadoes and hurricanes are graphic examples. ► The Fall also has resulted in a spiritual separation between people and nature. ► Prior to the Fall, God, people and nature had close spiritual fellowship with each other. ► The introduction of sin into the world and its corrupting effects on all of God’s created works broke apart this fellowship.<sup>10</sup>*

- f. As ► a result of the Fall and the subsequent curse, all of creation suffers as a mere shadow of its former self. The shadow still reveals a darkened profile of the magnificence of the original so we can appreciate it and even long for it. But we cannot now see or experience the fullness of the original. We experience it only in part—sometimes just enough to make us homesick. As believers, we eagerly await our restoration, our renewal, our redemption. Romans ► 8:22-23 explains,

<sup>NKJ</sup> Romans 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. 23 . . . even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

And everyone over forty says, “Amen!”

- g. Jesus ► Christ came to die on a cross to pay the price of restoration. Then He ascended to heaven to prepare the place of restoration.

On the night before He was crucified, Jesus told His disciples that He would soon be going away. In ► John 13:36, He says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> John 13:36 . . . “Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward.”

Just a few verses later, ► He says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> John 14:2 “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if *it were not so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.”

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<sup>10</sup> John C. Bergstrom, “Principles of a Christian Environmental Ethic: With Applications to Agriculture, Natural Resources, and the Environment,” available at <http://www.leaderu.com/science/bergstrom-enviroethics.html>; internet; accessed 27 February 2007.

If you have seen the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, you may recall a very brief scene in which Jesus is on his way to His crucifixion. His mother Mary comes to Him, and He says something significant. Unless you speak Aramaic, read the English subtitle in this very short video clip.

(Show ► the video, “All Things New.”)

In the movie, Jesus says to Mary: “I make all things new.” This is a direct quote from our text, Revelation 21:5. The movie has taken some liberties because we have no record of Jesus saying this on His way to the cross. But I agree with the idea of linking the renewal of all things with Christ’s crucifixion.

Indeed, Christ’s death paid the terrible price of redeeming us from the curse. Galatians ► 3:13 says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> Galatians 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse . . .  
.<sup>11</sup>

In ► Acts 3:21, the Apostle Peter explains that this Jesus who died and rose again will one day return, signaling . . .

<sup>NKJ</sup> Acts 3:21 “. . . the times of restoration of all things . . .”

- h. Our text in Revelation is simply a description of “the times of restoration of all things.” And I want you to notice a couple of points in the text.

First, ► Revelation 22:3 says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> Revelation 22:3 And there shall be no more curse . . .

The harkens all the way back to the Fall, when the garden-of-Eden paradise was lost. But in the new heaven and earth, the curse from sin will be lifted. The entire creation will be restored.

Further evidence of the restoration is provided in Revelation 22:2, where we’re told that the new earth will contain the tree of life, apparently the same tree of life in the garden of Eden before the Fall.

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<sup>11</sup> I realize this verse speaks specifically of the curse of the law, but it seems to me that this is still ultimately tied back to the curse from the Fall.

There are some reasons to believe that the new earth might not be an exact replica of the garden of Eden, but it seems clear that it will be Eden-like, and perhaps even better.<sup>12</sup> (So maybe John *was* listening to “In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida.” ☺)

Here’s the point: God isn’t going to abandon His creation; He’s going to restore it. And the very best things about life on this earth are merely a foretaste of what heaven will be like.

I have experienced certain “oh-my-God” moments in this life on earth. I don’t say that flippantly or profanely. There are certain rare moments I’ve experienced that are so beautiful, where I have such a sense of wellbeing that I just say to myself, “Oh my God, how could anything be better than this?” Those moments—the rare “oh-my-God” moments—are merely glimpses of the shadow of heaven.

Alcorn ► says,

*We have never seen the earth as God made it. Our planet as we know it is a shadowy, halftone image of the original. But it does whet our appetites for the New Earth, doesn’t it? ► If the present Earth, so diminished by the Curse, is at times so beautiful and wonderful; if our bodies, so diminished by the Curse, are at times overcome with a sense of the earth’s beauty and wonder; ► then how magnificent will the New Earth be? And what will it be like to experience the New Earth in something else we’ve never known: perfect bodies?<sup>13</sup>*

Wow!

- II. Well, ► so far we’ve covered the first part of the first verse of our text. Only 31 more verses to go. You’ve got nothin’ goin’ on for the rest of the day, do ya? No worries. We’re going to kick it into warp speed for the rest of the text, in part because we don’t have much time, in part because I don’t know what some of it means.

The last part of ► Verse 1 says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> Revelation 21:1 . . . Also there was no more sea.

Which, at first, I didn’t really like because I enjoy the ocean. But this doesn’t necessarily mean there won’t be large bodies of water on the new earth. After all, later we’ll see that there’s going to be a big river. Where does that go if not into a large body of water? Perhaps the sea that will

<sup>12</sup> Alcorn, 241-242.

<sup>13</sup> Alcorn, 108.

somehow be no more is the one referred to in the last part of Revelation 20, where Death and Hades and the devil will be cast. But, I don't really know for sure.

III. Anyway, in ► Verse 2 and 3, it says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> Revelation 21:2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God."

The establishment of a new ► city on the new earth suggests that we will live in community and we will have relationships, much like we do now. And notice the city is populated with ► "men." No women allowed. Just kidding. The Greek word is a generic term for human beings. We will be human beings in heaven, not disembodied spirits. In 1 Corinthians 15:42-58, the Apostle Paul explains that we will have new resurrected, incorruptible bodies.

Jesus Himself gives us a glimpse of what that will be like. He was the first one, and probably the only one so far, to be resurrected with an incorruptible body. After His resurrection He appeared to many of His followers. He was recognizable by the people who knew Him before. He had hands and feet and all the rest. He could be touched. He ate and drank. He talked. He did not appear in brutally beaten and crucified condition, so I take it that the wounds and disfigurement and deformities suffered from the sin and fallenness of this world were healed.<sup>14</sup>

In Matthew 22:30, Jesus says there will be no marriages between humans after our resurrection. But there will be one important marriage in heaven. Verse 2 ► speaks of a bride and a husband. Throughout the Bible, and particularly in the New Testament, God's people are collectively referred to as the bride, and the Lord Jesus is the Groom. On the thinking that our present earthly experiences present a mere shadow of things to come, I take it that the greatest intimacy that can be enjoyed in marriage today will not compare with the intimacy we will enjoy with the Lord in heaven.

A big reason why my relationship with Cathy is so profoundly important to me is that no one has known me like her. No one has accepted me like her. We know things about each other that no one else knows. But our intimacy, as vast and treasured as it is to me, will not compare to the intimacy we'll enjoy with the Lord in heaven.

Wow!

IV. In ► Verse 4, it says,

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<sup>14</sup> Although Jesus still had some scars (John 20:27).

<sup>NKJ</sup> Revelation 21:4 “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

This is great news! We'll still have relationships; but, there will be no conflict, no emotional pain, no betrayal, no disappointment, no loneliness, no wounded hearts, no abuse, no baggage, no sin. We'll have bodies; but, there will be no physical pain, no disease or dysfunction, no addictions, no deterioration, no death. No wonder the Apostle Paul says in Romans 8:18:

<sup>NKJ</sup> Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

- V. Then in ► Verses 5 through 8, John pauses to remind his readers how to make sure they get to heaven and avoid the alternative. He says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> Revelation 21:5 Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.” ► 6 And He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. ► 7 He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. ► 8 But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Here, John presents the alternative to living in the new heaven and new earth; that is, being thrown into the lake which burns with fire and brimstone. Which does not sound good. But the good news is that the Lord offers citizenship in the new earth “freely” to all who will simply believe Him for it. The Lord inspired John to record these words spoken by Jesus in ► John 6:47:

<sup>NKJ</sup> John 6:47 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.”

Living the Christian life on this earth can be very difficult. Following Jesus in this life can get very hard and painful. But booking your reservation for the new heaven and new earth is not complicated at all. Simply believe in Jesus.

- VI. Continuing in ► Verse 9, John says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> Revelation 21:9 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” ► 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God. Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

Then the imagery intensifies, beginning in ► Verse 12:

<sup>NKJ</sup> Revelation 21:12 Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: 13 three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. ► 14 Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. 15 And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. ► 16 The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. 17 Then he measured its wall: one hundred *and* forty-four cubits, *according* to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.

Now, I don't know whether to take this symbolically or literally. But one thing seems quite clear. New Jerusalem is a very big place. If you do the math, twelve thousand furlongs is about 1,400 miles. So New Jerusalem is 1,400 miles wide and 1,400 miles long. And most remarkably, it is 1,400 miles high. What does this mean? Is this an enormous mountain paradise of a city? Is this a giant cube? Or maybe a pyramid? Are there buildings that high? I don't know. But I think it's safe to say this place will be mighty big and impressive.

VII. Verse ► 18 continues:

<sup>NKJ</sup> Revelation 21:18 The construction of its wall was *of* jasper; and the city *was* pure gold, like clear glass. ► 19 The foundations of the wall of the city *were* adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation *was* jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, ► 20 the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. ► 21 The twelve gates *were* twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city *was* pure gold, like transparent glass.

To be honest, when I first read this, I thought, "It's hard to imagine what this looks like, but it sounds pretty gaudy." But as I thought about, is there anything about God's creation that now looks garish and gaudy? Nope. Not to me. So, I take it that neither will the city be garish or gaudy, just strikingly, dazzlingly beautiful.

VIII. Verse ► 22 continues:

<sup>NKJ</sup> Revelation 21:22 But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light. ► 24 And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. 25 Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). ► 26 And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. 27 But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

It is interesting to me that there will be ► “nations” represented in the New Jerusalem. The Greek word for “nations” is *ethnos*.<sup>15</sup> It describes ethnic groups. So, I take it there will be Latinos, and Asians, and Eskimos, and Scandinavians and African Americans and Anglos and every other ethnic group represented. And we will delight in the diversity. There will be nothing to defile our harmony. No hatred. No abominations. No lies.

IX. Revelation ► 22:1 continues:

<sup>NKJ</sup> Revelation 22:1 And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2 In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations.

I’m not quite sure what the tree of life is, but I like trees, and this sounds cool. But what really got me is that I’ve been wrong about something. Somewhere along the line I picked up the idea that maybe there would be no time in heaven. But here, we’ve got the tree of life yielding fruit ► monthly. This seems to blow the whole no-time deal out of the water.

X. Verse ► 3 continues:

<sup>NKJ</sup> Revelation 22:3 And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.

Now this is intriguing. We won’t be sitting around twiddling our holy thumbs. We will be ► serving the Lord. We will have work to do. Fulfilling work. Meaningful work. Satisfying work. The best moment of the part of the best job you’ve ever had is only a foretaste of it.

XI. Finally, we read in ► Verses 4 and 5:

<sup>NKJ</sup> Revelation 22:4 They shall see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads. 5 There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

We “shall see His face.” It is interesting that the Greek verb translated ► “shall see” is in something called the middle voice, emphasizing that we will see for ourselves. It’s almost as if we’ll be learning things for ourselves about the Lord and His creation in heaven. What is hinted here is corroborated elsewhere in the Bible. For example, ► Ephesians 2:6-7 says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> Ephesians 2:6 and [God] raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

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<sup>15</sup> BDAG, s.v. “ἔθνος.”

God is going ► to show or reveal “the exceeding riches of His grace.” And He’s going to do it in the ages to come, suggesting a progressive discovery of His greatness. In only makes sense. If God’s glory is infinite, then our discovery of new glory will never end, and our joy will be inexhaustible. Theologian, Jonathan Edwards describes heaven as “a neverending, ever-increasing discovery of more and more of God’s glory with greater and greater joy in him.”<sup>16</sup> And since the Bible tells us that God’s creation declares His glory,<sup>17</sup> it seems that we will spend eternity discovering the beauty of it. Perhaps we’ll even be able to more fully explore the vastness of the new universe. That could take a while.

And finally, Verse 5 says we’ll ► reign forever and ever. In what sense will we reign?

Well, before the Fall, God gave humans the privilege and responsibility of reigning over the earth. It involved ruling and serving. In ► Genesis 1:28, God spoke to Adam and Eve, saying,

<sup>NKJ</sup> Genesis 1:28 “. . . have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

And, in ► Genesis 2:15, it says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> Genesis 2:15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.

So reigning in the new earth seems like it would include a restoration of our responsibility to be good managers of God’s creation.

I don’t have time to develop the idea, but I think reigning also includes certain governmental responsibilities for serving in the kingdom of God. Furthermore, I think we’ll all reign in difference capacities, depending on how we served on this earth. In explaining the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 25, Jesus used a parable of a master entrusting his servants with certain resources and responsibilities on earth. To the servant who served faithfully, He ► says:

<sup>NKJ</sup> Matthew 25:21 . . . “Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.”

I think Jesus is talking about reigning in the new earth. The responsibility and joy of reigning in the new earth will be greater for those believers who follow Jesus faithfully on this earth. I don’t know about you, but this makes me want to do everything I can to be a good and faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ today.

Will you reflect on that this week? I invite you to prayerfully ask ► this question before God: Lord, in light of eternity on the new earth, what do you want me to do differently with my days on this earth?

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<sup>16</sup> Alcorn, 320.

<sup>17</sup> Psalm 19:1-6.