



Assurance

Revelation 21-22 – Leaders version

For a one hour study, just do the starred * questions

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including the leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

What does the passage say and mean?

90 minutes

Revelation 21

Read Revelation 21 v 1-4

1. What does John see in v 1-2? What does this mean?

He sees the new creation – a new heaven and a new earth, and a new Jerusalem. There is no sea in the new creation.

It's worth pausing here to think about the new creation – it's not well taught in many churches and may be a completely foreign concept to the group. The Bible doesn't teach that believers will be 'in heaven' for eternity, as popular thought would have it. It teaches that the souls of believers go to be with Jesus when they die (Luke 23 v 43, Philippians 1 v 23) and He will bring them back with Him when He returns (1 Thess 4 v 15-17) at which time those believers who are still living will go to be with Him too. At that time there will be a renewal of creation (including our bodies, with which we will be reunited, 1 Cor 15 v 42-44), in which there will be no sin or death. In this renewal of Eden mankind and God will be in open and intimate communication; God will live with us and be our God. It will be the final fulfillment of the OT covenants; God's people will be in God's place, living under God's rule and blessing. Rev 21&22 have the bulk of the teaching on this but 2 Peter 3 v 13 also mentions the new creation, as does Isaiah 66 v 22.

The absence of the sea is symbolic for the absence of sin – the sea was a frightening place to the Jews, a place where monsters were thought to lurk. The sea became symbolic of the wild, restless, untamed rebellion of man against God, and it is this rebellion against God that will not be in heaven, not necessarily an absence of large bodies of water!

2. What does John hear in v 3-4? What does this mean?

He hears a voice from God's throne giving a description of how things will be in the new creation. Spend some time thinking about what it will be like to be there, where there is no sin, death, mourning or pain and

where God lives amongst us and there is no temptation to worship anything or anyone else.

3. Read v 6-8. What do you think the spring of the water of life is? Read John 4 v 10-14 for a clue.

Jesus, in John 4 and Rev 21, speaks about the water of life – it is the gift of eternal life. In Rev 21, God says that He will give eternal life to ‘the thirsty’; to those who want it. It’s a statement about grace.

*4. What do you think God means in v8? Are certain sinners doomed?

This is a very important question to address as a group – don’t miss it out!

We know that sinners are not doomed, because Jesus came to rescue us. This is talking about unrepentant sinners, who have not been saved. It’s not a prescriptive list of people who are unforgiveable. Obviously people who have committed any of these sins (and may be in the room with you right now) are completely forgivable by Christ. The only difference between the people in v8 and in v7 is the living water, Jesus! ‘The second death’ refers to being consigned to hell. These people are already physically dead – having been judged they suffer the ‘second death’. Rev 20 v 6 – the second death has no power over believers.

?

Do you think it matters that we understand what the Bible teaches about heaven, rather than accepting what our culture teaches us about heaven? Why?

5. John sees a re-run of the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven. There is a lot of symbolism in what he sees, we’ll pick up on a couple of points. (The group can read the rest in their own time). What is written on the gates in v12 and the foundations in v14 and, based on this, what do you think the new Jerusalem symbolises?

Gates – the names of the 12 tribes of Israel – all of God’s people are present. The 12 tribes was all the Jewish (old covenant) people. Under the new covenant, all believers are spiritual descendants of Abraham. Foundations – the names of the 12 apostles – the worldwide church is built on the authority of the teachings of the apostles, (who were witnesses to the resurrection).

New Jerusalem – the worldwide church: we are the bride of Christ.

6. The foundations of the new Jerusalem in v18-20 are made of various precious stones. What were the gates made of in v21 and can you think of what this might symbolise?

The gates are made of pearls. The other precious stones are naturally occurring rocks but pearls form from a grain of sand in a seashell causing irritation to the oyster. Pearls are formed through pain and suffering.

6b. Can the group work out the possible significance of 'pearly gates' now?

The gates to heaven are made through suffering – Jesus' death on the cross in our place is the only point of entry. (I haven't found this in a book, but I heard it in a sermon).

7. Read v22-27. The focal point of the earthly Jerusalem was the Temple. Why is there no temple in the new Jerusalem?

There will be no need for a specific place to worship as God will be dwelling among us (v3).

(The OT tabernacle and temple symbolised the presence of God. Under the new covenant, with the Holy Spirit dwelling in our heart, we do not need to be in a building to be in the presence of God).

8. Why will the new Jerusalem not need the sun or the moon?

God's glory itself will give the light (remember the light of the glory of God in the night sky when the angels visited the shepherds in Luke 2!)

Note: not needing the sun or the moon doesn't necessarily mean that there won't be a sun or a moon. The whole of creation will be renewed, there's no mention of the sun and moon being destroyed in the new creation. I don't need most of the pens on my desk, since I work on a laptop, but the pens are still there...

?

We've learnt that the church is the bride of Christ and that, when the heavens and the earth are renewed, she will be beautiful. Why is the church not beautiful now? Are there any ways that you can help to change this?

Don't get caught up on specific issues, e.g. sexual sins in the church. Think about how we, as ongoing sinners, affect the reputation of both the (worldwide and local) church and of Jesus.

We all have a responsibility to look to our own behaviour and attitudes and see how we can change things in our little corner of the church.

Revelation 22

9. Read Revelation 22 v 1-5. What river is in the new Jerusalem and where does it come from? What does this mean?

Remember, the new Jerusalem is the worldwide church in eternity, not an actual city. The river of the water of life flows through it, coming from the throne of God and the Lamb. The water of life, as we saw above, is eternal life, coming from God the Father and Christ. Eternal life is flowing from the Godhead to the church.

10. What tree is found each side of the river, v2, and what does it do?

The tree of life, the leaves of which are for the healing of the nations.

11. Where else in the Bible do we come across this tree?

This tree was in the middle of the Garden of Eden, Genesis 2 v 9. When Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which they had been told not to do, they were banished from the garden so that they could not 'take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever' (Genesis 3 v 22). Before the Fall, they had access to this tree; to eternal life. Afterwards, they did not, because God had put an angel there to guard the way to the tree. Death became a reality because of sin.

In Rev 22 v 2 we see the tree of life in the middle of the new Jerusalem, with no barriers. In the new Jerusalem we see a picture of our return to Eden, to how things were always meant to be between mankind and God. There is no longer any curse, v3. Spend some time thinking about the significance, and the wonder, of such a thing!

12. Read Rev 22 v 4 and Exodus 33 v 20. Why have things changed?

Because of Jesus. Only through Jesus can we stand in God's presence – in Christ's righteousness, not our own. When Jesus comes back, and we are with Him for eternity, we can see God's face and live!

?

Think about the big picture of the Bible (it doesn't matter how well you know the Bible) – **1. Creation, 2. the Fall / ongoing sin, 3. Jesus coming to save us, 4. the new heavens and the new earth.** How does it feel to know that you are part of this picture and that God has had you in mind all the way through?

Explain that the Bible has two gardens as bookends (Eden and Eden restored) and that all the chapters in between are about our need to be saved and the One who came to save us. Seeing the Bible this way may help people to make more sense of what they are reading, especially in the OT.

This is a good opportunity to emphasize the relevance and importance of the OT, as well as God's overarching plan and unchanging nature, to anyone who only reads the NT.

13. Jesus says, in v7, 'Look I am coming soon!' This vision was almost 2000 years ago.

How are we meant to understand this?

When Jesus says 'soon', He doesn't mean 'in 5 minutes'. We know that because 2000 years later, we're still waiting for Him! However, the original readers didn't know that. For them, as it should be for us today, 'soon'

means soon in an unspecified way. 'With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises... He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance' (2 Peter 3 v 8-9). The reason Jesus hasn't come back yet is that He is patient and wants us all to have the opportunity to repent and be with Him in eternity. His point in saying 'soon' is that we are to be ready for Jesus' return – today, not tomorrow, is the day to get right with the Lord and share the gospel with those who don't know Him.

14. Read v12-14. What does Jesus mean when he says that He will reward people according to what they have done?

We know that He doesn't mean anything to do with works based righteousness as that would be inconsistent with the rest of Scripture. Verse 12 refers either to what we have done in accepting or rejecting Him, or what believers have done in the service of the Lord, as in 1 Cor 3 v 10-15.

Verse 15 is probably describing those who lived under the prevailing culture; as we've said before, this is not a list of unforgivable sins, rather a description of the unrepentant sinner.

15. Read v 18-19. These words are written about Revelation, but apply also to the whole of Scripture. In what ways do we tamper with Scripture and why is it so wrong?

There are several issues here!

- *Firstly, the accuracy of the document in our hand as compared to the original transcripts.*
- *Secondly, the accuracy of Bible translation into modern languages.*
- *Thirdly, culture. **This is the big one that is relevant to us all, so try to focus on this.** Our culture tells us that the Bible is outdated / God is outdated, His rules no longer apply / are offensive and that culture can define morality. This is where we are all at risk of adding to, or subtracting from, the Bible, and in this we are all responsible before God. Encourage the group to think of ways that society has moved away from Biblical living and to think of ways that we as individuals have done this. Try not to focus on sexual sins or abortion (because you don't know the histories of the people in the room) but if those topics do come up, be very careful not to be perceived as judgmental.*

If you want further information from a very good and small book, see Barry Cooper's 'Can I really trust the Bible?'

?

Read Revelation 22 v 17. What invitation is Jesus holding out to us and what is your personal response?

?

What has been your biggest learning point from these studies of the book of Revelation?

?

Read Revelation 22 v 20-21 together as a group, as a prayer if everyone is happy to do this.

Check out – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

Assurance
Revelation 21-22

What does the passage say and mean?

Revelation 21

Read Revelation 21 v 1-4

1. What does John see in v 1-2? What does this mean?

2. What does John hear in v 3-4? What does this mean?

3. Read v 6-8. What do you think the spring of the water of life is? Read John 4 v 10-14 for a clue.

4. What do you think God means in v8? Are certain sinners doomed?

?

Do you think it matters that we understand what the Bible teaches about heaven, rather than accepting what our culture teaches us about it? Why?

5. John sees a re-run of the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven. There is a lot of symbolism in what he sees, we'll pick up on a couple of points. What is written on the gates in v12 and the foundations in v14 and, based on this, what do you think the new Jerusalem symbolises?

6. The foundations of the new Jerusalem in v18-20 are made of various precious stones. What were the gates made of in v21 and can you think of what this might symbolise?

7. Read v22-27. The focal point of the earthly Jerusalem was the Temple. Why is there no temple in the new Jerusalem?

8. Why will the new Jerusalem not need the sun or the moon?

?

We've learnt that the church is the bride of Christ and that, when the heavens and the earth are renewed, she will be beautiful. Why is the church not beautiful now? Are there any ways that you can help to change this?

Revelation 22

9. Read Revelation 22 v 1-5. What river is in the new Jerusalem and where does it come from? What does this mean?

10. What tree is found each side of the river, v2, and what does it do?

11. Where else in the Bible do we come across this tree?

12. Read Rev 22 v 4 and Exodus 33 v 20. Why have things changed?

?

Think about the big picture of the Bible (it doesn't matter how well you know the Bible) – **1. Creation, 2. the Fall / ongoing sin, 3. Jesus coming to save us, 4. the new heavens and the new earth.** How does it feel to know that you are part of this picture and that God has had you in mind all the way through?

13. Jesus says, in v7, 'Look I am coming soon!' This vision was almost 2000 years ago. How are we meant to understand this?

14. Read v12-14. What does Jesus mean when he says that He will reward people according to what they have done?

15. Read v 18-19. These words are written about Revelation, but apply also to the whole of Scripture. In what ways do we tamper with Scripture and why is it so wrong?

?

Read Revelation 22 v 17. What invitation is Jesus holding out to us and what is your personal response?

?

What has been your biggest learning point from these studies of the book of Revelation?

?

Read Revelation 22 v 20-21 together as a group, as a prayer if everyone is happy to do this.