

Revelation 22:1-5

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The angel continues to show John the new earth, which is a place with no curse where the people of God will live with Him face to face.

Revelation 22 picks up where Chapter 21 left off, with the angel giving John a tour of the new earth. This time *he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street* (vv 1-2a).

The beginning of Chapter 21 focused on the throne of God and the words of the One who was on the throne. Now we see the *river of the water of life* that comes *from the throne of God and of the Lamb*.

It appears that the *river of the water of life* is literal because John describes it as being *clear as crystal*. He also describes it as flowing *in the middle of its street*, perhaps referring to a street somehow associated with the landscape surrounding God's throne. We are told there is no temple in the new earth, because "the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Revelation 21:22). Perhaps this street with a river in the middle indicates that God's throne is outdoors. That would seem to fit the idea of the new earth having a perfect environment, with no night.

The prominent place of the *river* in this city is in *the middle of the street*. The main street has a river in the middle of it. Perhaps it is like a divided highway with a median, but in this case the median contains a river.

On the current earth, rivers flow downstream from high places to low places. Notwithstanding the fact that the current laws of physics could very well not apply in the new earth, it seems like *the throne of God* must be on a high elevated place like a mountain, from which flows the *river*.

In the current earth, water is transported to high places via rain or snow, then flows downhill, becoming streams, then rivers, then lakes or seas. In the new earth, the headwater of the *river* is the *throne of God* as well as *the Lamb*. *The Lamb* refers to Jesus (Revelation 21:23). In a great paradox, Jesus the *Lamb* is also the shepherd of the people who will lead them to "springs of the water of life" (Revelation 7:17). It appears that the Lamb who is also a shepherd is the source of the springs of the water of life. The indication is that He will lead people to Himself.

Next, the view expands to what is around the *river*:

On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations (v 2).

This *tree* is not just for looks, as many of the trees in our current cities are, but it is also for food, as it bears *twelve kinds of fruit*. It also seems as if the current seasons do not apply in the new earth, as the tree yields *its fruit every month*.

The final attribute of this *tree* is that *the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations*. So not only does the *tree of life* yield *twelve kinds of fruit every month*, but its *leaves* also have *healing* properties.

This does beg the question that if it is true that on the new earth “there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4), why is there a need for *healing*?

One possible explanation is that these *leaves* provide preemptive *healing* before there is disease. But whatever the reason for their existence, it is worth noting that the *healing* is for *the nations*. There will still be *nations* in the new earth.

The river with the tree of life on either side is said to flow with the *water of life*. The Greek word translated *life* is “*zoe*” which refers to the quality of life. It appears that the picture being given is that humans have been fully restored in their original design, but the new earth is even superior to Eden. Rather than a single tree of life, there is now a tree of life that spans both sides of the river and bears twelve fruits.

After we fell, humans were exiled from the Garden of Eden lest we eat of the tree of life and live forever (Genesis 3:22-23). Since death entered the world when Adam sinned, this move by God was one of grace, as it prevented humans from becoming the living dead. Here, at the end of this era of human history, the exiles have returned to the perfect garden. And now the tree of life is the source of immortality once again.

The theme of exile and return runs throughout scripture. The exile of the Jews to Babylon from Judah is likely provided as a picture of the story-arc for the human race. The earth we live on now is a broken fragment of what God intended. At this point in Revelation 22, in the new earth, humans are restored not just fully, but abundantly.

Now the image shifts from a physical description of the new earth to a description of the state of the new earth:

There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him (v 3).

This verse has three assertions of fact:

1. *There will no longer be any curse.*
2. *The throne of God and of the Lamb will be present on the new earth.*
3. *His bond-servants will serve Him.*

First, *there will no longer be any curse*. This references the *curse* given in Genesis 3. This curse is threefold:

To the serpent, God *cursed* it to slither on its belly, showing that nature was cursed, having fallen from the original harmony with God’s design. To the woman, Eve, God *cursed* her ability to gain full satisfaction from her relationships. And to the man, Adam, God *cursed* his ability to gain full satisfaction from work (Genesis 3:15-19).

Two primary areas of life that are cursed in these passages are relationships and the growth of food. We already see that the *curse* of Adam has been lifted with the *tree of life*, that it bears *fruit* without toil. But the new earth will also see all these other curses gone.

On the relationships side, there was implemented strife between both the serpent and the woman as well as the woman and the man. Both humanity's relationship with animals and with each other are currently *cursed*: God promised a deliverer would come to deliver the earth from the deceiver, saying He would bruise him "on the head"—indicating a fatal wound:

“And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel.”
(Genesis 3:15)

Jesus has already overcome sin and death. He has defeated Satan. In the future, Jesus will banish Satan to the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10). That will be the completed fulfillment of this promise from Genesis 3.

Satan has continued to deceive humans throughout history. In the new earth, his ability to deceive will be at an end. In the new earth, humanity will no longer try to meet our needs through inappropriate means. In this present world, Satan deceives us into thinking we can gain happiness for ourselves if we exploit others in order to satisfy our own needs.

Sadly, when we do this, we hurt others as well as ourselves. We often advance a futile attempt to control others, when that is a mere illusion; we cannot control others. In the new earth, it appears that we will embrace reality, and it will lead to living in great joy.

Each person has been given the gift of choosing three things: who they trust, the perspective they choose, and the actions they take. We tend to neglect stewardship of these vital choices and instead pursue an illusion that we control others, or our environment. This is because of the Fall of Man. But in the new earth, that will be restored. We will return from our exile.

Living in illusions is a part of the death that comes from the fall. Death is separation, and when we fell, we were divided internally within ourselves. We have lost touch with reality. We rationalize and blame; one of Adam's first acts after he fell was to blame (Genesis 3:12).

But in the new earth, the exiled human race will return to the garden where there is no more death (Revelation 20:14). Those who enter the city will drink of the water of life and eat of the tree of life. Death will be no more. The curse will be gone.

The second and third assertions in Revelation 22:3 is that *The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it* [the new earth], *and His bond-servants will serve Him*.

Throughout scripture, God's throne is depicted as being in heaven, and heaven is stated as the place where God dwells. In the new earth, His throne will be on the earth. The culmination of this era of human history is that heaven comes to earth (Revelation 21:3, 22). The Lord's Prayer

will be answered; God's will will be accomplished on earth as it is in heaven because heaven will now be upon the earth (Matthew 6:10).

The *throne* is stated to be shared by *God* and the *Lamb* (Jesus). This is consistent with the image of Revelation 3:21, where Jesus is given to share His Father's throne with Him because He overcame rejection by the world. Before Jesus came to earth, He was already ruler of the universe as God. But He became a human, a Lamb that was sacrificed for the sins of the world (Hebrews 9:12).

Thus, Jesus the Lamb of God is God become human. Jesus now shares the throne of God as a human. He was rewarded to rule the earth as a human, although He is also God. He is Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23). Fully God and fully human. This goes beyond our capacity to comprehend, and is a great paradox. (For more, read our Tough Topics Explained article: [Founding Paradox](#)).

Jesus was rewarded the title of "Son" for His faithful obedience, according to the ancient tradition historians call a suzerain-vassal treaty (for more, see "[Suzerain-Vassal Treaties](#)"). His reward was to be granted all authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18; Hebrews 1:5, 8, 13). Jesus desires to bring "many sons to glory" to reign with Him (Hebrews 2:10). The sons are the overcomers He will reward them by sharing His throne with them (Revelation 3:21).

But all those who share this reign with Him will be *His bond-servants*, and they will *serve Him*. There will be no tyrants in the new earth. No abusive bosses. No abuse of authority. Only those who are servants will be granted authority to reign.

In the new earth, all of the leaders will be servants. Jesus will rule over the new earth (Revelation 19:15). Jesus was rewarded by God with authority over the heavens and earth, as a human, because He was obedient, even to death on a cross (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:5-9; Hebrews 2:10). Jesus was given all authority because He was willing to lay down His life in service (Matthew 20:28).

Jesus has invited all who believe in Him to join His administration in reigning over the earth. Here in Revelation, the servants of God are promised a great blessing if they will read, hear, and do/keep the instructions in this prophecy (Revelation 1:3). Revelation tells believers they will gain immense rewards, incredible blessing, if they live their life on earth as overcomers. Jesus promises those who follow His example and overcome death, loss, and rejection by the world that He will share His throne with them, even as the Father shared His throne because Jesus overcame (Revelation 3:21). For more, read our article: "[Overcomers](#)."

Thus, only those who have proven they are servants will be given authority in the new earth. We see in the Parable of the Talents that the great reward the master bestows upon the servants who were faithful stewards is to be promoted to have greater authority (Matthew 25:21). The new earth will have no self-serving leaders. Only those willing to serve a mission of mutual benefit will be allowed to have authority.

All believers are granted an inheritance to reign with Christ (Ephesians 1:1, 18; Colossians 3:23). Those who overcome rejection from the world take the step to gain their full reward and fully possess their inheritance (Hebrews 2:10, 4:1-4). These believers who overcome are then fully

restored to God's original design for humans to reign over the earth in harmony with Him, nature, and one another (Hebrews 2:5-10).

Next we learn that, not only will there *no longer be any curse*, but also that *they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads* (v 4).

Since the Fall of Man, no humans have been able to see the face of God. This was apparently not the case in the Garden of Eden. It seems that there, Adam and Eve had intimate communication in God's presence.

In Genesis 3, after Adam and Eve had eaten the forbidden fruit, it says that:

“They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”
(Genesis 3:8)

It can be inferred that Adam and Eve routinely experienced the physical presence of God since they were able to hide from it. At the end of the curse, God “sent [Adam] out from the garden of Eden,” and therefore he was apparently exiled from His presence as well (Genesis 3:23).

It seems that since that time, no one has been able to see the face of God. Moses asked to, but God replied that, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live” (Exodus 33:20).

Apparently nature also cannot bear God's physical presence. We saw earlier in Revelation that “earth and heaven fled away” from the presence of God (Revelation 20:11).

But now that there will *no longer be any curse*, part of the *curse* being taken away is a restored ability to *see His face*.

Furthermore, *His name will be on their foreheads* (v 4).

In Exodus, God instructed the Israelites on what the priest should wear, which included an engraved plate to go on the forehead:

“You shall also make a plate of pure gold and shall engrave on it, like the engravings of a seal, ‘Holy to the Lord.’ You shall fasten it on a blue cord, and it shall be on the turban; it shall be at the front of the turban. It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall take away the iniquity of the holy things which the sons of Israel consecrate, with regard to all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord.”
(Exodus 28:36-38)

The sign of “Holy to the Lord” on Aaron's forehead was to be a symbol of his function as a priest. Likewise, when the overcomers are told that *His name will be on their foreheads*, it implies that they will also be carrying out a priestly function.

Revelation 5 says:

“Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”
(Revelation 5:9-10)

Overcomers will become priests, and the sign of God’s name *on their foreheads* will apparently be a symbol to everyone else showing their priestly role. The role of a priest is to serve as an intermediary for God. This might infer that there will still be some who dwell upon the earth who cannot engage fully in the physical presence of God. This is confirmed a few verses later, in Revelation 22:15.

The last piece of the description of the new earth is that:

there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever (v 5).

The *curse* on the earth was abolished in verse 3. The curse of Genesis 3 deals with energy balance. Weeds put their energy into seeds, thorns, and roots rather than fruit, so the weeds and thorns grow preferentially. Therefore, it takes human effort to grow fruiting plants (Genesis 3:17-18). It would seem that in the new earth, this curse is reversed. Perhaps now fruiting plants grow preferentially.

Further, in the energy cycle of the current earth, plants get their energy from the sun, we get our energy from eating the plants (or animals that ate the plants), and then we put our energy back into tending to the plants (and animals) so that we can continue getting food from them.

But since there is no more curse, in the new earth it appears we will not have to toil for food or put our energy into overcoming the inertia of weeds and thorns.

That there is no *need* for *the light of the sun* infers that the new earth will have a different energy cycle. However, there is still food and good *fruit* from the *tree of life*, so there will still be eating in the new earth. But it seems that the energy of God will have a direct influence on the earth and be sufficient to sustain all things. That there is *no night* infers that the new earth might not be in an orbit, which is what creates day and night on our current earth. This might also explain how the new Jerusalem could be 1500 miles in height (stated as twelve thousand furlongs in Revelation 21:16). That the city would be this tall would infer that the hospitality for life does not diminish with elevation, as in the current earth.

Perhaps there is no sun at all in the new earth. Perhaps when Jesus says *Behold, I am making all things new* that includes a completely new design for dwellings in the universe. There might be a new physics, a new chemistry, and a new biology. But whether or not there is a sun, *the Lord God will illumine them*.

The inference is that the physical presence of God is as bright as the sun, and yet we will thrive in His presence, especially now that we can *see His face*. In the previous chapter, we were told of some people, based on various behaviors, who will have a part in the lake of fire (Revelation

21:8). They were contrasted with those who overcame and were given the title “son” which is a title given to those who learn obedience, following the example of Jesus (Hebrews 1:5, 2:10).

It could be that this new reality of believers walking in light as bright as the sun is prefigured by the story of the three faithful Hebrews walking in the fiery furnace with what might be a preincarnate Jesus (Daniel 3:24-25). In that story, three faithful Hebrews who refused to bow to a pagan idol were sentenced to death in a fiery furnace, and instead thrived in the flame. It could also be that the Babylonian soldiers dying from exposure while attempting to stoke the fires of the furnace might picture those who are unbelievers, whose destiny is to spend eternity in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10, 15).

This picture of the new earth presents a fascinating paradox involving mountains and fire. In our current world, we are drawn to the majesty of the mountains, but those who attempt to scale them often meet with death, and those who succeed in the attempt may only stay a short time if they desire to survive. But in the new earth, the New Jerusalem appears to be on an incredibly high mountain, and that mountain is a source of life, housing both the tree of life and a river of life (vv 1-2).

Similarly, in this present earth we have a fascination with fire, but must be very cautious lest it destroy us. But here in the new earth, it appears that God’s glory is as bright as the sun, but is something His people revel in. This is yet another picture of how the new earth will satisfy the deepest desires of our hearts for those who are redeemed. It also appears that those who are not redeemed might be in the same environment, but for them it will be torment.

One of the main themes of the book of Revelation is that we don’t need to fear what will take place in the future because God is ultimately in control. The word “throne” appears over forty times in Revelation, and primarily refers to God’s throne. The dramatic events of Revelation are authorized by God, an example being the “four horsemen of the apocalypse” where “a crown was given” (Revelation 6:2), “it was granted (Revelation 6:4), and “authority was given” (Revelation 6:8).

This point, that God is always on His throne, is further emphasized in the statement that the *bond-servants* of God will *reign forever and ever* (vv 3, 5). This will be so because to those who overcome, Jesus will give to them the right to sit with Him upon His throne (Revelation 3:21). God is always on His throne. He gave all authority to Jesus, the name above every name, because He followed in His will to take the form of human flesh and suffer and die for our sins (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:8-9; Hebrews 2:9-10). Jesus has promised to reward all those who overcome rejection from the world, as He overcame, by sharing His reign with Him.

That reign will be *forever and ever* (v 5). The phrase rendered *forever and ever* translates one Greek word that is repeated, “aion aion.” The Greek word “aion” means “age” or “era.” It is often translated as “eternal” when it might better be better understood as “to the end of the age.” For example, in Matthew 12, “aion” is translated as “age”:

“Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age (“aion”) or

in the age to come.”
(Matthew 12:32)

In this Matthew passage, the context demands the translation of “age” but likely would be better understood as “to the end of the age” in many other instances.

However, in this instance of *forever and ever* in v 5, the Greek repeats the word “aion.” Thus, “aion aion” indicates the idea of “to the age of the ages.” Accordingly, this is an instance where the idea of “eternity” in the sense of “forever and ever” is appropriate.

Biblical Text

¹ Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, ² in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve *kinds of* fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; ⁴ they will see His face, and His name *will be* on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will no longer be *any* night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.