

November 20
Lesson 12

LIVING

WATERS

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 46

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Revelation 22:1-7

REVELATION 22:1-7

¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

⁶ The angel said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.”

⁷ “Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.”



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KEY VERSE

The angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.—Revelation 22:1

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. State characteristics and function of the river of life.
2. Compare and contrast [Revelation 22:1-7](#) with [Genesis 2:8-10](#) and [Ezekiel 47:1-12](#).
3. Prepare a devotional of hope based on [Revelation 22:1-7](#), and submit it for publication in his or her church's newsletter.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Life Extenders
- B. Lesson Background

I. What John Sees ([Revelation 22:1-5](#))

- A. Water of Life ([v. 1](#))
Consider the Source
- B. Tree of Life ([vv. 2a, b](#))
- C. Leaves of Healing ([v. 2c](#))
- D. Absence of Curse ([v. 3a](#))
- E. Servants of God ([vv. 3b-5](#))

The Problem of Night

II. What John Hears ([Revelation 22:6, 7](#))

- A. Angel Speaks ([v. 6](#))
- B. Jesus Speaks ([v. 7](#))

Conclusion

- A. The Beginning and the End
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Life Extenders

How long do you expect to live? A person born in 1850 in America had an average life expectancy of less than 40 years. That statistic is skewed, however, by a high infant mortality rate. Those born in 1850 who managed to live to be 5 years old (thus avoiding the many deadly illnesses that claimed young children) could expect to live to their mid-50s.

Today's life expectancy is between 75 and 82 years, depending on race and gender. The sharp increase is due to better medical treatment, chlorination of drinking water, etc. Yet some people want to extend their lives even further. They work hard to eat healthy food, maintain high fitness levels, etc. Predictions are that we will continue to see a greater percentage of our fellow citizens in their 90s and 100s than ever before.

The Bible tells the story of the paradise of Eden that was lost to humanity because of sin. In this garden was the tree of life, and eating its fruit would allow men and women to live forever (see [Genesis 2:9, 3:22](#)). When Adam and Eve sinned, they were expelled from the garden and denied access to this tree ([2:17; 3:22-24](#)). Death has been a certainty for every child born ever since (with the two exceptions in [Genesis 5:24](#) and [2 Kings 2:11](#)). What if we could have that life-giving fruit? Today's lesson pictures just such an opportunity in John's vision of the new Jerusalem.

B. Lesson Background

The image of *water* is used in both physical and spiritual senses in the Bible. In a physical sense, fresh (sweet) water has as its opposite water that is brackish (bitter). Fresh water sustains life ([Judges 15:18, 19; Job 38:25-27](#)); water that is brackish or absent altogether yields the opposite ([Deuteronomy 8:15; 2 Kings 2:19-22](#)). The ultra-salty Dead Sea is aptly named!

The prophets Ezekiel and Zechariah had visions that bear similarities to John's vision of the new Jerusalem. A feature of the city foreseen by Ezekiel and Zechariah was that of a river flowing out of it. The water of this river is so refreshing that it not only nourishes life, it changes the ultra-salty Dead Sea into a freshwater lake ([Ezekiel 47:8; Zechariah 14:8](#); compare [Joel 3:18](#)). In Revelation, the idea of spiritual water includes the property of eternal life. Such water is seen as a divine gift, an ever-flowing fountain that provides life to those who drink of it (see [Revelation 7:17; 22:17](#)).

Another feature of the new Jerusalem drawn from the Old Testament is a *tree of life*. This mysterious tree is referred to in three books in the Bible. It first appears as an important part of the Garden of Eden ([Genesis 2:9](#)). A (but not "the") tree of life is also mentioned four times in the book of Proverbs as metaphors for divine wisdom ([Proverbs 3:18](#)), the fruit of righteousness ([11:30](#)), desire fulfilled ([13:12](#)), and a properly used tongue ([15:4](#)).

Finally, *the tree of life* is mentioned in Revelation as a primary feature of "the paradise of God" ([Revelation 2:7](#)). We might call this paradise *Eden restored* as people eat the fruit of the tree with God's blessing.

I. What John Sees

(REVELATION 22:1-5)

A. Water of Life (v. 1)

1a. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal,

As we pick up where last week's lesson ended, John is still inside the holy city, the new Jerusalem of his vision. He is still being guided by an angel of the seven bowls of [Revelation 21:9](#).

John sees a river, and his descriptions of it signify two things. First, the river's purity and clarity indicate that anything that might pollute it has been banished from the city. This water is not muddy or cloudy. It does not have the greenish tinge of algae, as stagnant water might have. We can imagine that it gives off no bad smell (contrast [Exodus 7:21](#)). The city of pure gold ([Revelation 21:21](#)) features a river of pure water.

Second, the river's designation as *the water of life* implies much more than a refreshing source of water for a parched throat. The water has divine qualities, and we do not sense that John is surprised by this. He seems to expect to find this river of life in the new city. His vision is that of a great urban complex combined with a garden paradise. No garden would be lush and inviting without a proper water source.

CONSIDER THE SOURCE

We live in a time of merchandising exaggeration—but you already know that. Like you, I have seen health products advertised to add 10 years to one's life. Marketing hype for a diet pill claims you will lose 42 pounds in two weeks. (That's three pounds a day!) As the list grows ever longer, there seems to be more and more wisdom in the old Roman adage *caveat emptor* ("buyer, beware").

Advertising for bottled water seems particularly bold considering the nature of the product. A typical claim is that a certain brand comes from a mountain spring or some other emotionally satisfying source. A mountain spring may indeed be the source, but there is no certificate that says the water from there is purer than the water from your own well or municipal supply.

Bottled water in sizes smaller than one gallon did not exist in the U.S. prior to 1976. But that was the year that single-serve bottled water began to be marketed successfully. Since then, bottled water has become the \$12 billion industry that it is today in the U.S.

It's amazing that people will spend so much money to ensure they drink the best water but at the same time will be rather careless about the quality of the "spiritual water" they consume. In our next half verse, John tells us about the only proper source for that kind of water. And we won't have to worry about recycling plastic bottles!—J. B. N.

1b. flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb

The river streams from the central feature of the city. In so doing, the vision again defies our expectations, which are grounded in the daily experiences of life. A cube-shaped city is hard to imagine ([Revelation 21:16](#)). Pearls large enough to be carved as city gates are unknown to us ([21:21a](#)). Streets of transparent gold have never been seen ([21:21b](#)). Likewise, a spring on a mountaintop city that results in a river that flows from a seat of authority is something we can only wonder at. As we do, we acknowledge that in the new Jerusalem there may be new laws of physics that defy current textbook science.

HOW TO SAY IT

caveat emptor (Latin) *ka-vee-ought emp-ter*.

Ezekiel *Ee-zeek-ee-ul* or *Ee-zeek-yul*.

Zechariah *Zek-uh-rye-uh*.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to be a conduit of the "water of life" to others on a daily basis?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

To unbelievers who are spiritually thirsty

To unbelievers who are skeptical of the church

To believers who have backslidden

Other

B. Tree of Life (vv. 2a, b)

2a. down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life,

This verse also describes something difficult for us to visualize: the river of life, which comes from the throne, is in *the middle of the great*

street of the city. We need to think of an immense street here, a boulevard or parkway so broad that a river with lush, fertile banks divides its lanes.

To propose dimensions is speculative. But perhaps we can imagine a street that is 200 yards wide (double football-field length) with a tree-lined river taking up the middle 100 yards of it (single football field), and golden lanes ([Revelation 21:21](#)) that are 50 yards wide each on each side of the river. This may give an idea of proportions, but it is likely that the scene John witnesses is much grander than this.

This river of living water leads to *the tree of life*, known to us from [Genesis 2:9](#) (see the Lesson Background). This is similar to Ezekiel's vision of a great river flowing from a restored Jerusalem temple to transform the Dead Sea ([Ezekiel 47:1-12](#)). The prophet saw this river lined on both sides with many trees ([47:7, 12](#)). Some scholars believe that is what John is seeing here, and that we should take *tree* in a plural sense as being a forest or grove of trees. But that is not what John describes.

Somehow, the tree of life is on both sides of the river, perhaps spanning it and towering over it. This is a gigantic tree, not a dwarf variety. Its powerful roots spring up from each side of the river and support a mighty trunk with branches that droop to the banks on each side of the river. This makes its fruit and leaves easily accessible to the residents of the city. No tree can grow like this naturally, and we do not need to expect such growth here. This is a supernatural tree planted by the Lord.

^{2b}. bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month.

The tree is fruit bearing, but in a way unlike that of any fruit tree of our experience. We might know of different months for picking various fruits (cherries in June, peaches in July, apples in September), but we know of no tree that bears 12 varieties of fruit with a different one ripening each month!

Even so, an ever-bearing multi-fruit tree is one more feature of the new Jerusalem that exceeds anything in our experience. The practical aspect of this is that the life-giving fruit will be available to citizens of the city daily without interruption or times of shortage. The eternal city has an eternal tree that provides eternal life.

C. Leaves of Healing (v. 2c)

^{2c}. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

In modern city life, we do not associate tree leaves with healing. The closest we may come is using the gel of aloe vera leaves to treat burns. But aloe vera is a plant, not a tree.

Yet consider that tea leaves are dried and boiled to obtain a liquid with healthful properties. Tea leaves come from the tea shrub, which is considered by some to be a small tree. The idea presented in the verse before us seems to be that the leaves of the wondrous tree of life can be used to produce a healing elixir of some sort.

This healing is not stated to be for curing of wounds, viruses, etc. Rather, it is for *the healing of the nations*. A key idea is that of spiritual healing for all the peoples from many nations, for [Revelation 21:24](#) (last week's lesson) depicts the kings of the earth streaming into the new city. This indicates, among other things, a final and lasting peace among all nations. In this light, the city is truly the new Jerusalem as we recall that *salem* means "peace" (see [lesson 8](#)).

D. Absence of Curse (v. 3a)

^{3a}. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city,

The holy city is just that—utterly holy. It admits neither anything that is accursed nor anything that needs to be cursed (compare [1 Corinthians 12:3](#); [16:22](#); [Galatians 1:8, 9](#)). The curses of humanity are gone.

We often think that the first curse resulting from the first sin was the cursing of Adam and Eve. But the first two curses were on the serpent ([Genesis 3:14](#)) and on the ground itself ([3:17](#); compare [5:29](#); [8:21](#)). There is no Satan-serpent in this city, for he has been consigned to the lake of fire (see [Revelation 20:2, 10](#)). There is no cursed ground, for the fertile soil and water of life allow the tree of life to thrive with its year-round fruit and healing leaves.

[Proverbs 3:33](#) tells us that "The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous." Yet there will be no wicked people in this city! Any and all things that might bring divine condemnation are absent, for the city is overwhelmed by God's throne and inhabited by his righteous servants. At long last, humanity will be freed from the stain of sin that ended residence in the original garden.

What Do You Think?

What practices have you found most useful in helping you live beyond the sin-curse daily?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Practices for achieving a positive outcome

Practices for avoiding a negative outcome

E. Servants of God (vv. 3b-5)

3^b, 4. and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

The psalmist asks “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” ([Psalm 42:2](#)). The answer is right here! Everyone living in the city will have access to the throne.

All residents of the city are God’s servants, and John describes them in three ways: what they do, what they see, and how they are marked. What they do is *serve him*. The Greek verb behind this can be translated “worship” or “serve” ([Acts 24:14](#); compare [Philippians 3:3](#); [Revelation 7:15](#)). The servants are engaged in acts of worship before the throne of God.

What they see is *his face*, which John does not describe. (We will have to wait to see for ourselves; [1 John 3:2](#).) To see the face of a king in the ancient world is a gift of fellowship (compare [Esther 1:14](#); contrast [Exodus 10:28](#)). This is a fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to those with pure hearts ([Matthew 5:8](#); compare [Psalm 17:14, 15](#)).

How they are marked is with God’s *name ... on their foreheads*. This is a divine marking placed by either Jesus ([Revelation 3:12](#)) or God’s angels ([7:1-3](#)). It is a beautiful image of acceptance and possession by God. It is the opposite of the mark of the beast that is placed on unbelievers (see [13:15-17](#); [14:9-11](#); [16:2](#); [19:20](#); [20:4](#)).

What Do You Think?

What are some positive and negative aspects of the various ways that believers attempt to “mark” themselves as Christians?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding Christianized bumper stickers
- Regarding Christianized clothing accessories
- By keeping a Bible prominently visible at work
- Other

5. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

We encountered this *no more night* description in last week’s lesson concerning [Revelation 21:23, 25](#). There as here, light given off by God himself illuminates the city. But now we see an important addition: the never-ending light is accompanied by the never-ending reign of God’s people. This fulfills the prophecies and promises of [Daniel 7:18, 27](#) and [Revelation 1:6; 5:10](#). As Christ will “reign for ever and ever” ([Revelation 11:15](#)), so shall we with him!



Visual for Lesson 12. Give each learner a copy of all stanzas of this hymn (public domain) to compare and contrast with today's text.

THE PROBLEM OF NIGHT

"It was a dark and stormy night" is the opening line of the novel *Paul Clifford*, written by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1830. Although often parodied, that line fairly represents a sense of pending doom. The darkness of nighttime is often symbolic of evil—of bad tidings, forebodings, and disasters. Night is a time of fear, and there is even a scientific word to identify fear of the dark: *achluophobia*. Children can feel threatened with the "bogeyman," a nocturnal prowler. Prolonged darkness can lead to psychological problems.

The fact that the writers of the New Testament view *night* and *darkness* also in negative terms tells us that human nature doesn't change in this regard (examples: [Luke 1:79](#); [11:33-36](#); [John 12:35](#); [Romans 13:12](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:4-8](#); [1 Peter 2:9](#)). God's solution is to banish night forever!

When that happens, all the fears and disorders associated with darkness will be no more. As children of light, we will be with the eternal light, the one in whom "is no darkness at all" ([1 John 1:5](#)). Until that time, let us have an urgency for the work of the kingdom as Jesus did when he said "As long as it is day, we must do works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work" ([John 9:4](#)).—J. B. N.

II. What John Hears

([REVELATION 22:6, 7](#))

A. Angel Speaks (v. 6)

6. The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

The angel speaking is still the angel of the bowls ([Revelation 21:9](#)), John's guide to the holy city. The angel's statement touches on several

things we have read previously. First, the emphasis that what John hears being *trustworthy* and *true* are the same two affirmations made by him “who was seated on the throne” at the beginning of the vision of new Jerusalem (21:5; compare 3:14; 19:11).

Second, the reliability and importance of *these words* are underlined by reference to their source as being *the Lord, the God who inspires the prophets*. This fact serves to (1) include John in the ranks of earlier prophets and (2) emphasize the nature of the book of Revelation as prophecy (Revelation 1:3; see 19:10; 22:19).

Third, the visions are described as God’s showing to *his servants the things that must soon take place*. The wording in the Greek is precisely the same as that found in the book’s opening lines (Revelation 1:1). There are 15 verses left in the book as we come to the verse before us, but the final mention of showing—which is that of the holy city—is right here. Thus the initial showing of Revelation 1:1 and the final showing of Revelation 22:6 serve as book ends to the showings in between them (compare 4:1; 17:1; 21:9, 10).

We may wonder why the angel promises that *the things* will happen *soon* when, from our perspective of some 2,000 years hence, they are yet to occur. Many explanations have been proposed. One idea is that all the events of Revelation happen “invisibly” and are known only to a spiritually elite group. Another theory is that these events are symbolic ways of describing the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 as the new era of the church began. A more likely explanation is that these events will happen “quickly” when they do come, but they are being delayed for reasons we understand only partially (compare 2 Peter 3:9).

God is not controlled by time in the ways we are (2 Peter 3:8), and we are wise to use that reality to temper our desire to know details of the future. The message of Revelation is trustworthy and true even if we are inadequate to comprehend all of it. Let us believe that when these events do take place, those who are witnesses and have read Revelation will think, “Of course! Now it all makes sense.”

What Do You Think?

What should others see in us that demonstrates we believe Jesus may return at any time?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In how we conduct relationships
- In what we value
- By the topics of our casual conversation
- Other

B. Jesus Speaks (v. 7)

7. “Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.”

The voice of the Lamb breaks through to deliver a promise and a blessing. He will return. He has not abandoned his people. In the midst of suffering, whether from the ancient Roman government or modern persecutors, he is with us. The initial blessing of Revelation 1:3 is repeated—directed to those who keep *the words of the prophecy*. That leads to the great question prompted by Revelation: What does keeping these sayings entail?

The book does not hide the answers to this question. Faithfulness is the primary answer, and that concept includes repentance (Revelation 2:5, 16; 3:3, 19; 9:20, 21; 16:9, 11) and patient endurance in the face of opposition (2:10; 13:10; 14:12).

To be faithful is to keep the words of the prophecy!

To repent is to keep the words of the prophecy!

To endure is to keep the words of the prophecy!

There is an abiding message here that transcends any confusion we might have about the details of Christ’s second coming. When he comes, may he find us faithful (compare Luke 18:8).

What Do You Think?

Which specific Scriptures help you most to remain faithful and not give up? Why?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Scriptures that promise
- Scriptures that comfort
- Scriptures that encourage
- Scriptures that warn
- Other

Conclusion

A. The Beginning and the End

Many things have clearly defined beginnings and ends. We begin reading a book, then we finish it. We buy a house, then we sell it. We begin a job, then the job ends. Transcending all our starts and stops of life is the timelessness of God, who was there at all the beginnings and will be there at all the ends. He is the Alpha and Omega, the A and Z, but with an enduring nature that stretches beyond the range of any human alphabet.

All this is illustrated by the new Jerusalem, a city to feature a physical size that is beyond our comprehension. It will be a city with unending day, an ever-flowing river of life, an ever-bearing fruit tree of life, ceaseless worship, and priceless building materials. It will be ever new.

Such will be our relationship with the Lord. That relationship will be eternally consistent, pure, and true. Yet this description fails to describe the relationship fully, for there is a limitlessness on God's side. Nonetheless, we are blessed by John's revelation to us of his visions. May we be faithful in keeping the lessons we learn.

B. Prayer

Father, we barely understand the marvels of your promised holy city, a place where you will provide all the light we need for both eyes and hearts. May we hold these promises tightly, so that when your Son returns, he will find us faithful and ready. We pray this in his name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Seek the living water now!

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Into the Lesson

If finances allow, provide a bottle of water for each learner, being sure that somewhere on the label is the word *pure*. (If you choose, provide one bottle to a single learner, and ask that learner to read the whole label aloud.) Note other words on the label that imply the unadulterated quality of the water within.

Alternative. Show a wrapped bar of Ivory soap and ask, "Does anyone here remember or know the original advertising for this soap product?" The original ad touted Ivory as "99 44/100% pure. It floats!" Note: A product "99 44/100% pure" is *not* pure, by definition, for it obviously contains 56/100% of contaminants.

For either example used, comment, "Aah, purity! It is a thing to be desired. Today's study begins with absolute purity and then describes a place and consequence of such purity. Let's take a look."

Option. Distribute copies of the "There Is a River" activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Use it as a way to introduce the theme of the river of life.

Into the Word

Give to each learner a sheet divided into three columns with the headings [Revelation 22:1-7](#), [Genesis 2:8-10](#), and [Ezekiel 47:1-12](#). Give these directions: "Find all three of these texts, and write into the three columns appropriate elements you find in at least two. Match them up side by side to see God's pictures of the ideal place God wants for his children." Allow five to eight minutes for work. You might choose to put your learners into groups of three and give one of the texts to each learner in each group so they can read back and forth to make their decisions and entries. After the allotted time, ask each to identify a parallel discovered among the three texts. Comment on the consistency with which the biblical revelation proceeds.

Before class have one of your artistic class members prepare a simple sketch of a tree ([Revelation 22:2a](#)) with leaves and conspicuous fruit, 12 different kinds if possible, with each piece of fruit large enough to write a word or two on it. Have it labeled "Golden Blessing Tree." Copy and distribute this image to each learner. Give these directions: "Look once again at today's text. Identify 12 golden blessings we will receive in Heaven. Abbreviate each one enough to write it onto one of the fruit images on The Tree of Life. On several of the leaves, write in the medical prescription symbol, Rx, to indicate the truth of [verse 2b](#)."

Entries such as "no night" and "life-giving tree" are obvious. Such entries as "no hunger" and "no scars of sin" may not be as obvious, but will be legitimate entries, because of the consistent supply of life-giving fruit and the spiritual healing effects of the leaves. As learners identify their entries, commend both the obvious and the not-so-obvious suggestions.

Option. Use the "Just the Opposite" activity from the reproducible page to allow a close look at the text to identify elements of the new heavens and earth pictured therein.

Into Life

Give your learners the following list of devotional titles. “Put Away the Handkerchiefs”; “A River with an Interesting Source”; “What an Odd Fruit Tree”; “Forget the Flashlights”; “Can You Believe It?”; “How to Be One of the Blessed.”

Say, “Examine this list of titles connected to our study text today. Relate each one to a verse or an idea there. Choose one that you will develop in writing. Consider two ways to let your thoughts encourage and bless others: (1) send it by e-mail to all other class members, or (2) submit it to the church office for consideration for publication in the church newsletter or bulletin. Everyone needs to think about the glories of our heavenly home.”