

A NEW HOME

DEVOTIONAL READING: Revelation 21:1–9

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Revelation 21:1–9

REVELATION 21:1–9

¹ Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

⁶ He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. ⁸ But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

⁹ One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

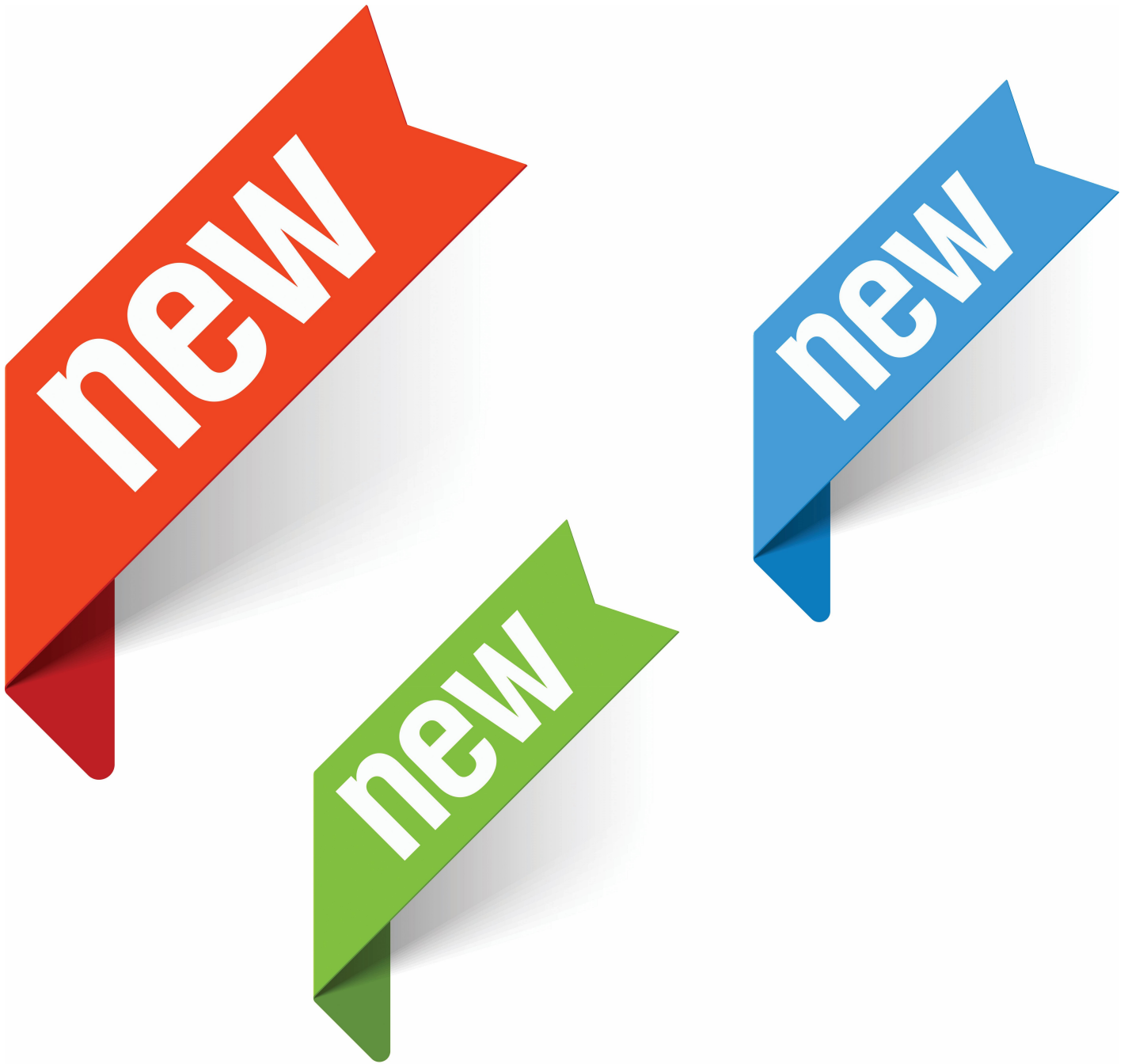


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KEY VERSE

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.—Revelation 21:4

PARTNERS IN A NEW CREATION

Unit 3: The Great Hope of the Saints

LESSONS 10–13

LESSON AIMS

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

1. Classify those who escape “the second death” and those who do not.
2. Contrast aspects of the old creation with counterparts or other aspects of the new creation.
3. Identify one way to shift his or her focus from the current world to the new heaven and earth, and make a plan to do so.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. New City
- B. Lesson Context
- I. United (Revelation 21:1–4)
 - A. Heaven and Earth (vv. 1–2)
 - B. God and His People (vv. 3–4)
 - Happily Ever After—or Not?*
- II. Separated (Revelation 21:5–8)
 - A. New Creation (vv. 5–6a)
 - B. Life Water (vv. 6b–7)
 - C. Fire Lake (v. 8)
 - Dangerous Fiction*
- III. Transition (Revelation 21:9)
 - A. Angelic Messenger (v. 9a)
 - B. Lamb’s Wife (v. 9b)

Conclusion

- A. One Life
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Aegean	<i>A-jee-un.</i>
Alpha	<i>Al-fa.</i>
apocalypse	<i>uh-pock-uh-lips.</i>
Artemis	<i>Ar-teh-miss.</i>
Domitian	<i>Duh-mish-un.</i>
Ephesus	<i>Ef-uh-sus.</i>
Omega	<i>O-may-guh</i> or <i>O-mee-guh.</i>
Patmos	<i>Pat-muss.</i>
utopian	<i>you-toe-pea-un.</i>
Zechariah	<i>Zek-uh-rye-uh.</i>

Introduction

A. New City

My family and I have lived in several different cities. But a few years ago, we took a trip to interview for a job in a new city. We were excited to visit a city of which we knew nothing.

We arrived at night. Our host drove us past a shimmering lake, gleaming tall buildings, a new ballpark, and other intriguing sights. We were impressed. The city seemed clean and vibrant.

But living there for several years—in the daylight—exposed us to other sights as well: the scruffy neighborhoods of substandard housing; the once-proud mall that was nearly abandoned; the vacant lots of former gas stations that awaited environmental cleanup. The city, like many others, is a mix of the new and the old, the shining and the tarnished, the well-maintained and the dilapidated.

Also like many other cities, it is home to many strong churches and faithful Christians. But it's not without its share of gangs, prostitution, domestic violence, and corruption. Were someone able to establish a new city that had just the good parts, it wouldn't stay that way for long. An internet search on the subject of utopian movements is telling in this regard. Such a topic is great fodder for science-fiction stories. But the utopianism of today's study is not in that category.

B. Lesson Context

The book of Revelation (not “Revelations”) is fittingly the last book in the Bible. It is likely the final book that was written, penned by the apostle John near the end of his life. A very

early tradition places the writing in about AD 96. That was the final year of Roman Emperor Domitian's 15-year reign, the year he was assassinated.

John was on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea ([Revelation 1:9a](#)). The island was a barren, rocky place of fewer than 14 square miles in area. It is generally believed that John had been exiled there as punishment for conducting forbidden evangelistic work in the city of Ephesus (see [1:9b](#)).

The book of Revelation has three parts. The first chapter relates an appearance of the risen Christ to John on Patmos. Christ told John that he (John) was to receive visions of glorious and mysterious things. John was to write them down for sending to the churches of seven nearby cities ([1:11](#)).

The second part of the book consists of personalized messages to those churches ([Revelation 2–3](#)). We sometimes refer to these messages as “letters to the seven churches,” but they are more than that. Each serves as an introduction to the book as a whole for the named congregations.

The third part, [Revelation 4–22](#), is John's record of the series of visions he experienced. These are visions of Heaven and its activities, along with prophetic words delivered to John by angels who served as his guides.

The book of Revelation features a type of literature known as apocalyptic. The root word *apocalypse* does not mean “worldwide catastrophe” (as the word is often used in popular media today), but “uncovering of the hidden” and thus “revelation.” This book reveals the hidden workings and plans of the Lord God Almighty in the midst of the church's trials and tribulations, to give hope to the persecuted. It has been serving this function for nearly 2,000 years, showing readers that evil will not triumph. God has a plan for ending the power of evil emperors and of Satan and his allies.

I. United

([REVELATION 21:1–4](#))

A. Heaven and Earth (vv. [1–2](#))

1a. Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,

Sin has spoiled creation, and God's promised solution is to re-create. This is not simply a “makeover,” for the current *heaven* and *earth* are to be *passed away* to make way for the *new*. For more detail regarding how that is to happen, see [2 Peter 3:5–7, 10](#).

1b. and there was no longer any sea.

John's vision of a new creation differs from the first creation story in [Genesis 1](#) in a way we

see here. The seas were hostile places to ancient peoples, as they often are today. But there will be no

such terror in the new creation. The prediction of *no more sea* symbolizes not just the absence of chaos and horror in the depth, but also the complete impossibility of such sorrow reaching into the New Jerusalem.

2. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

The descent of *the new Jerusalem* indicates that *heaven* and earth are to be linked in a way that is analogous to *bride* and *husband* being joined in a wedding ceremony. This is another major feature of the new heaven and earth.

Jerusalem is referred to as *the Holy City* six times outside the book of Revelation (see [Nehemiah 11:1, 18](#); [Isaiah 48:2](#); [52:1](#); [Matthew 4:5](#); [27:53](#)). Those are idealized descriptions since there always seemed to be unholiness present (examples: [2 Kings 21:16](#); [Lamentations 1:8](#); [Micah 1:5](#)). By contrast, the New Jerusalem is holy in all ways and at all times because of the very presence of God.

Isaiah foresaw a time when many would desire to “go up to the mountain of the Lord” to worship him ([Isaiah 2:3](#)). “Go up” is a natural thing to say since earthly Jerusalem is at a higher elevation than the surrounding terrain (compare: [1 Kings 12:27–28](#); [Psalm 24:3](#); [Zechariah 14:16–17](#); [Matthew 20:17–18](#)). How surprised Isaiah might be with John’s clarifying vision as Isaiah’s “mountain of the Lord” becomes a city that is coming to meet us! This is further clarified in [Revelation 21:10](#) (not in today’s text), where we are given the impression that the holy city is descending to rest on top of a mountain. [Isaiah 52:1](#) and [61:10](#) prefigure the images of the phrase *as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband*.

What Do You Think?

Which practice in [1 Peter 4:7–11](#) should you focus on to help prepare the church for Christ’s return?

Digging Deeper

How would you rank-order the practices in [1 Peter 4:7–11](#) in terms of importance for the last day? Or is that even possible? Explain.

B. God and His People (vv. 3–4)

3a. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

A *voice from the throne* speaks at least twice in John’s visions ([Revelation 16:17](#); [19:5](#); compare [10:4](#); [11:12](#); etc.). The source of the voice in the verse before us is unspecified, but we should probably understand it as the voice of an angel. Elsewhere in this book (especially in

chapter 14), angels speak in *loud* voices to make great pronouncements.

3b. “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

The voice announced the significance of the new city. In Old Testament times, God’s *dwelling place* was the portable tabernacle (2 Samuel 7:6), which was used before the temple was built. The tabernacle was actually a tent; the Hebrew word is translated that way in hundreds of places (example: Genesis 4:20).

We may struggle to comprehend God as dwelling in a tent inside a city, no matter how perfect and glorious either might be (see Acts 17:24)! But that is not the point here. John’s vision is revealing a time when all the things that separate us from perfect fellowship with God will be removed.

Will that seem like city dwelling to us? Perhaps (see Revelation 21:10–27). The important thing is that we will *be his people* and he will *be [our] God*. There will be no physical or spiritual barrier separating us. This is an absolute and eternal future, not a temporary situation like the current separation of Heaven and earth. “So we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

4. “‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

The heavenly voice went on to describe some of the spiritual and emotional aspects of this situation to come: *death* and every other cause of *pain* and *mourning* will be *no more*. This is surely one of the greatest promises in the Bible, a verse that we can hold dearly (compare Isaiah 25:8; 35:10; 65:19; Revelation 7:17). Life brings us sorrow, sometimes unrelentingly. We tell ourselves “It can’t get any worse,” and then it does. Sometimes it is the headline news of great tragedies. Often it is the personal news of our families. Christians are not immune from pain and tears.

But try to imagine no more causes for weeping! The emotional body blows we now suffer will cease forever! Just as the old creation is passed away, so will be our lives of pain and hardship. How can this be? Won’t we remember the past and its pain? John goes on to explain some of the aspects of this in the remainder of Revelation.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to use pain to grow spiritually?

Digging Deeper

Does your answer differ depending on whether the pain is physical or spiritual? Explain.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER—OR NOT?

A friend of mine made some very bad choices and ended up in a coma. After about a year, the coma gave way to death. He woke once from the coma during that year, but he was not the same man. He couldn't speak, and diminished capacity was evident.

We visited often and held prayer circles around his hospital bed. During one particular prayer time, I happened to look up and see his face twisted in what could only be described as revealing anguish, sorrow, and regret. Did he at that moment realize wasted opportunity because of bad decisions?

Here on this earth, we cannot escape coming face-to-face with the death of loved ones. We will see and experience the resulting sorrow. There's no avoiding it.

What we *can* avoid while on this earth is the pain of regret for having wasted life on ungodly pursuits and unholy lifestyles. And if repentance has occurred before Christ returns, even the tears of having wasted one's life can pass away (compare [2 Chronicles 33](#); [Luke 7:36–48](#)).

This might be a good time to give some thought to what constitutes “happily ever after.”

—P. M.

II. Separated ([REVELATION 21:5–8](#))

A. New Creation (vv. 5–6a)

5. He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

Whereas an angel seems to have been speaking in our previous verses, the phrase *he who was seated on the throne* indicates that John then heard directly from God himself (see also [Revelation 4:9](#); [20:11](#)). Twelve times in this book John is told to *write*, and this is the final one.

The *trustworthy and true* fact that the Lord will make *everything new* is certainly a commentary on all that John saw. But there is more here. This is a promise for the readers, a promise so important that John is reminded he must write it down.

This promise was needed in John's day as his readers dealt with the dark specter of persecution and martyrdom. This promise is also needed today for believers struggling to live faithfully for Christ.

The pain and heartaches we experience are not the final chapter of our stories. There is an eternal future that has no more pain or tears, a time when all is new and perfect, a time when nothing grows old or corrupt.

6a. He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.

Combining the image of a throne of authority (above) with the self-designation *the Alpha and the Omega*, we must again conclude that the voice is that of “the Lord God ... the Almighty” ([Revelation 1:8](#)). Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet (also [22:13](#), [lesson 13](#)). So in English, this is like the voice saying, “I am A and Z.” This concept is reinforced as the voice from the throne self-identified as *the Beginning and the End*. We take care to note that this is not an attempt to establish beginning and ending points for God’s existence or reign. It is saying, rather, that he is both the source and the goal of all things.

God was there at the beginning of history with the first creation, and he will there at the end of history as well—at the re-creation of heaven and earth.

He is “the Lord God Almighty” who reigns forever ([Revelation 19:6](#); compare [Isaiah 44:6](#); [48:12](#)).



Visual for [Lesson 10](#). Before closing with prayer, listen to and/or sing a hymn together that celebrates the Alpha and Omega.

B. Life Water (vv. 6b–7)

6b. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.

We are not to understand this promise merely to mean that the New Jerusalem will have a safe and abundant water supply. Rather, this is a fulfillment of a promise from the prophet Isaiah, who prophesied spiritual satisfaction for those who seek the Lord ([Isaiah 55:1](#)).

We rightly understand this image to be that of eternal *life* ([John 4:10–14](#)). But there is more here. In the language of John, the living *water* is also the Holy Spirit ([7:38–39](#)). No spiritual thirst will go unquenched in the new Heaven and earth. Just as there is direct access to the Lord God and to Christ the Lamb, there will be a lavish abundance of the Holy Spirit to all residents of the New Jerusalem (compare [Revelation 22:17](#)).

What Do You Think?

Considering any of the other four “What Do You Think?” questions in this lesson, what are some ways you can better avail yourself of the Holy Spirit’s life-giving support?

Digging Deeper

What are some wrong or questionable practices you’ve seen in this regard?

7. “Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

The theme of overcoming, or being victorious, is pervasive in the book of Revelation and elsewhere in John’s writings (see [John 16:33](#); [1 John 2:13–14](#); [4:4](#); [5:4–5](#)). This is based on the Greek word *nike* which derives from Nike, the name of the Greek goddess of victory. (The same word is trademarked today as a line of athletic apparel.) To overcome is to conquer and be *victorious*.

Each of the greetings to the seven churches in [Revelation 2](#) and [3](#) ends with a promise to the one who overcomes: permission to eat from the tree of life ([2:7](#)), immunity from the second death ([2:11](#)), a new name ([2:17](#)), authority to rule the nations ([2:26](#)), a white robe ([3:5](#)), a part in the New Jerusalem ([3:12](#)), and even an invitation to share the great throne of authority ([3:21](#); compare [2:26](#)). All these are summed up in the verse before us, for the one who overcomes is promised to *inherit all things*.

This is a climactic, all-inclusive promise to the readers, to us. God promises to be our God, and we can consider ourselves his sons and daughters. In this we are “co-heirs with Christ” ([Romans 8:17](#)).

What Do You Think?

What spiritual practice helps you most in being an overcomer?

Digging Deeper

Which element of the armor of God in [Ephesians 6](#) do you associate with that response?

C. Fire Lake (v. 8)

8a. “But the cowardly, the unbelieving,

The picture here is that of a cosmic housecleaning. Those listed are the opposite of the overcomers of the previous verse, the antithesis of the victorious who have lived faithfully. *The cowardly* are those who have been afraid to commit fully to Jesus and thereby overcome. Similarly, *the unbelieving* are those who refuse to trust Jesus and follow him.

8b. “the vile, the murderers,

The word translated *vile* includes the sense of stench, those who stink of sin. It also has the sense of being polluted and may be inclusive of those who live hypocritically (example: [Romans 2:17–29](#)). *Murderers* is a category especially pointed to those who have killed the faithful, the victims who cry “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” ([Revelation 6:10](#)). Martyrs (those who die for the faith) will not share eternity with their unrepentant killers.

8c. “the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts,

The sexually immoral is a general category including various sins, in particular those who engage in prostitution. These violate God’s standards for sexual purity. The word being translated occurs as part of a wider word group, members of which appear 56 times in the New Testament, with 19 of those in Revelation. *Those who practice magic arts* seek power through the spiritual forces of evil and are thus completely opposed to God.

8d. “the idolaters and all liars—

Idolaters constitute an ongoing threat to the church. This problem is underlined by this book’s connection with Ephesus ([Revelation 2:1–7](#)); that city was the home of the great temple of the pagan goddess Artemis, also known as Diana ([Acts 19:23–41](#)).

The list concludes with a group we might think would be a lesser threat: *liars*. The idea behind this designation is only partly covered by saying that these are people who tell lies. More directly, these are false believers, imposters in the church (see [2 Corinthians 11:13](#); [Galatians 2:4](#); [2 Peter 2:1](#); [Jude 4](#); [Revelation 2:2](#)). God, who knows the hearts of all, will see through any pretense.

DANGEROUS FICTION

Truthiness. Popularized by satirist Stephen Colbert in 2005, that word is defined as a seemingly truthful quality that is claimed for something not because of supporting facts or evidence but because of a feeling that it is true or a desire for it to be true.

The rise of “truthiness” tag-teams with the misuse of social media to make it close to impossible to discern truth from fiction. Certain algorithms built into social media platforms and

internet search engines make it easier to access information that reaffirms our own beliefs, sometimes regardless of any basis in fact. To distinguish between truth and falsehood becomes increasingly difficult as a result.

But there is hope in the God who both speaks truth and is truth. A focus on him and his Word is what will keep us from becoming liars, whether in the general sense or the specific sense of false believers. Is he indeed your primary source for truth?

—P. M.

8e. “they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

Rather than be admitted into the city, those listed go to their just punishment. There they will join their true masters: the devil and his associates ([Revelation 19:20](#); [20:10](#)). To be consigned to *the fiery lake of burning sulfur* is to be cut off from God and Christ for eternity.

III. Transition

([REVELATION 21:9](#))

A. Angelic Messenger (v. [9a](#))

9a. One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came

The angel referred to here is first noted in [Revelation 15:1, 6–7](#) (see also [17:1](#)). The number *seven*, which often signifies completion or perfection, occurs about 90 times in the New Testament. The book of Revelation features more than half of those!

B. Lamb’s Wife (v. [9b](#))

9b. and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

What the angel is about to show John is further discussed in [Revelation 18:23](#); [19:7–8](#); [21:2](#) (above); and [22:17](#) (see [lesson 13](#)).

Conclusion

A. One Life

Life seems to gallop by at ever-increasing speed as we age. We cannot slow it down. I have a plaque in my office to remind me of this. It reads:

Only one life, ’twill soon be past,

Only what's done for Christ will last.

To me to live is Christ.

What does the future hold for us then? John's vision is that of a genuine, eternal utopia. The New Jerusalem will be the perfect place, for it is the dwelling place of God and of the Lamb. It will be a place of spiritual wholeness, where there will be no more tears and where those who despise God are denied entrance. It will be the ultimate, eternally new city, the city of God for all time.

We have confidence, for we believe that the promises of Revelation “are trustworthy and true” ([Revelation 21:5](#)). We have a reward, for we are heirs of the riches of God ([21:7a](#)). Most of all we have an assured hope, for we will have perfect, eternal fellowship with him ([21:7b](#)).

What Do You Think?

Considering this quarter's title “Partners in a New Creation,” what's the most important thing you can do to prepare yourself for your role in that partnership?

Digging Deeper

How should your head, hands, and heart interact in that regard?

B. Prayer

Eternal God, may we never forget your promises! May we not fear death, for we that your Son has conquered death. In his name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Trust the promises of Revelation!

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Divide your class into three equal groups. The Wonderful Group will brainstorm a list of why your community is a wonderful place to live. The Difficult Group will brainstorm a list of why your community is a difficult place to live. The Prediction Group will try to anticipate

what each of the other two groups will say by making lists under each of those two categories. Distribute handouts (you create) that state the groups' assignments.

After five minutes, have the first two groups report their conclusions in a back and forth manner. As they do, members of The Prediction Group should listen to decide which of the other two groups is more convincing.

After discussion, lead into Bible study by saying, "No matter how much we appreciate life in this community, the Bible describes a place that will be better. Let's see why and how."

Into the Word

Distribute printed copies (you prepare) of [Revelation 21:1–9](#), one handout per person. Include on the handout the following tasks:

- 1–Underline every promise.
- 2–Circle every symbol.
- 3–Star everything that gives you hope.
- 4–Put a question mark beside what you don't understand or makes you somewhat afraid.

Have participants complete the tasks as you read the text aloud twice.

Then have participants pair off to compare and contrast their conclusions. As they do so, write the following questions on the board:

- 1–Which verses did you and your study partner mark the same? Why?
- 2–Which verses did you and your study partner mark differently? Why?
- 3–What surprised you most in this exercise? Why?

After a few minutes, reconvene for whole-class discussion.

Option 1. To focus on the "symbol" aspect of the first set of tasks, distribute copies of the "Words as Depictions" exercise from the reproducible page, which you can download. Learners can work on this in study pairs, or they can use it as a note-taker as you work through the text. It should not be used for individual in-class study.

Option 2. To explore symbolic language further, also distribute copies of the "Here Comes the Bride" exercise from the activity page, to be completed as [Option 1](#), above.

Into Life

Form learners into groups of three or four; distribute to them paper, markers, and appropriate art supplies to create "real-estate brochures" for Heaven. Each brochure should help a person looking at it to shift focus from his or her current residence to a future residence in the new heaven and earth. Challenge participants to sketch a biblical picture as well as list rea-

sons someone should want to move there.

Encourage your “artists” to use as many descriptions as possible from today’s text, couching them in terms today’s adults would understand. The brochures should communicate with those outside the church as well as with longtime believers.

Option 1. Have groups do the above, but make separate brochures for believers and unbelievers.

Option 2. After the above exercise, time allowing, give each participant a slip of paper and have them write on one side to all class members. On one side they are to complete the first sentence below; on the other side, the second sentence:

The best thing about my life is ...
The most difficult thing about my life is ...

Allow no more than a minute before asking for volunteers to share (don’t put anyone on the spot). Discuss how both will change in eternity.