



Revelation 23
Our Future Reign

By

Mark McGee

Chapter One

Are you familiar with Revelation 23?

Probably not because the Book of Revelation ends with Chapter 22. However, that isn't the end. Our future as God's people is never-ending.

Here's what the Apostle John saw in his vision of Heaven and our future with God.

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no

lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. Revelation 22:1-5

Notice the references to the first chapters of Genesis in the last chapter of Revelation –

- water of life
- river
- tree of life
- fruits
- leaves
- curse
- God's face
- light
- reign

God gave humans everything needed to reign with Him, but we lost it through Adam's sin. However, we receive it back in great abundance through Christ's sacrificial defeat of the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). God created humans to reign with Him – and reign we will.

Our Future Reign

The vision of our future with God ends with verses 1-5 of Revelation 22. What follows in verses 6-21 contain an angel's directive to John concerning not sealing the words of the prophecy, final words from Jesus Christ to the seven churches mentioned at the beginning of the Revelation, and a warning not to add to or take away from the prophecy.

Revelation chapters 19 – 22 reveal to everyone who reads them the final moments of the last days. You can compare the words in these chapters with what Jesus told His disciples when He was with them on earth and what the prophets spoke thousands of years ago.

What I'd like to focus on in this study is the last sentence in verse 22:5 – “And they shall reign forever and ever.” Notice these key words:

- they
- shall reign
- forever and ever

In Bible study we first observe words, word structure, and context. Once we are satisfied that we have seen everything there is to see in the text and context, we move to questions for interpretation. Once we are satisfied that we have asked and thoroughly answered every question arising from the text and context, we move to interpreting the text. Once we are satisfied that we have accurately interpreted the text, we move to applying the text as prescribed by the process we have followed.

They

We find the meaning of the word “they” in the context – “His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.”

The word “they” refers to God’s servants. Who are God’s servants? We also learn who they are by reading the context – “And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.” Revelation 21:23-25

God's servants are those "who are saved." Who are the saved? "... only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life"(Revelation 21:27b). How does one get his or her name written in the Book of Life? "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son" (Revelation 21:6-7).

As we continue to ask questions for understanding and interpreting the text, we reach backward in the Book of Revelation to arrive at these words – "To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (Revelation 1:5-6). The saved who will inherit all things are those who believed Jesus Christ loved them and washed there from their sins in His blood shed on the Cross.

As Paul said and wrote so clearly concerning salvation:

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household. Acts 16:31

... that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Romans 10:9-10

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

If you believe in Jesus Christ the way Paul has written, you are saved and your name is in the Book of Life.

Having said that, let me add another word. Salvation is not repeating a little prayer saying you believe in Jesus, then go on your merry way to live your life in any way you want. Salvation is not what you get from growing up in a Christian family or going to a church. If that's what you think, I highly recommend you read the Gospels, Acts, and apostolic letters again. Then, read them again.

Salvation means you trust in Christ for your life and are committed to serving Him forever and ever. Many people who think they are saved will wake from the sleep of death to face the wrath of God. Jesus made that clear in one of His early sermons about His Kingdom.

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'
Matthew 7:21-23

Jesus continued to echo that message throughout His earthly ministry.

Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. Matthew 25:44-46

If you wonder whether the word “they” in Revelation 22:5 refers to you, ask yourself why you wonder that. What about your belief and/or behavior would cause you to question whether you will be one of the “they” who are God’s servants who will serve Him forever and ever. Trust me – it’s worth your time now to think about your future in Heaven. When Jesus judges – will you be on the right side or the wrong side?

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Matthew 25:31-34

Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Matthew 25:41

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were

written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:11-15

My prayer is that you will be on the 'right' (righteous) side when Jesus comes into His Kingdom. You will be one of the "they" of Revelation 22:4 – "They shall see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads."

Shall Reign

God created humans to reign with Him –

Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

Genesis 1:28

The word “dominion” in Hebrew is *radah* and means “to rule, to dominate.” God created humans to rule the earth with Him. However, there was a stipulation to that rule. Humans were God’s creation. They were created in God’s image and likeness, but they were not God. They would rule with Him by serving Him. Even as they ruled and dominated the earth, their service would include obedience to their Creator.

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. Genesis 2:15-17

Satan, a powerful angel who was disobedient to God, moved in quickly to subvert humanity’s special relationship with God.

Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. Genesis 3:4-5

Adam and Eve bought into Satan’s lie and we have history as evidence of the results of that lie. God created angels and humans to serve Him. That’s what we see in Revelation 22:3 – “His servants shall serve Him.”

God's intention when He created the first heaven and first earth was that humans would rule and reign with Him. That is God's intention for the new heaven and the new earth as well. Remember how Revelation begins:

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” Revelation 1:5-6

Those people who God loves and have had their sins washed in the blood of Christ are “kings and priests.” Kings and priests of what?

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be

with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Revelation 21:1-4

Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.' And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Revelation 21:9-11

But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie,

*but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.
Revelation 21:22-27*

We will be kings and priests of a new heaven and new earth.

And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth. Revelation 5:10

The Greek word for “reign” is *basileuó* and means “to be king, to rule.” We will be with Christ and share in His reign on the earth.

None of this should surprise us. The apostles made it quite clear that God's people would rule and reign with Him.

This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. 2 Timothy 2:11-12

Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? 1 Corinthians 6:2

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Revelation 20:4

Before we might think too highly of ourselves, let's remember that Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. We will rule and reign with Him, but we are His servants – “the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him (Revelation 22:3). May we never forget who rightfully sits on Heaven's Throne.

Chapter Two

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. Revelation 22:1-5

In our previous study we began looking at Revelation 22:5 – “And they shall reign forever and ever.” We looked at the words “they” and “shall reign” to understand what the terms mean within the context. If you haven’t read the first part of our study, please [click here](#).

We move next to the words “forever and ever.”

Forever and Ever

How long will this future of ours last? According to Revelation 22 – forever and ever! That is a long, long time, though I don't know if *time* as we know it now will even exist in the new heaven and new earth. We know time from the movement of the sun around the earth as day and night, hours and minutes; but what does Revelation tell us about that?

There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

That leads me to Revelation 23. I use that term in the sense of how we will be reigning with Christ “forever and ever.” I am not adding to or subtracting from the vision that is “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” That is not allowed (Revelation 22:18-19). I am only using the term for the purpose of helping us think deep into the future that Revelation refers to as “forever and ever.”

What will we do forever and ever?

His servants shall serve Him.

We will serve God. How will we serve Him?

And they shall reign forever and ever.

Reigning is one of the primary way we will serve God. We will reign with Christ forever and ever. We will be with Christ forever and ever. That is our future.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

Millions of Christians who died before the Lord's return will rise from the dead first, then those Christians who are alive at the time of the Lord's return will be "caught up" (seized, snatched up, raptured) with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. All Christians will be with Christ "aways."

I believe that means we will "reign" with Christ wherever He wants us to reign. Earth is one of the locations mentioned specifically.

Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth. Revelation 5:8-10

What we will be doing forever and ever is serving God according to His eternal purpose and plan. We learn in Revelation that we will serve as “kings and priests to our God” and “shall reign on the earth.” The “earth” is a key to understanding some of what we will do forever and ever.

Every Christian is a servant of God now, whether they fully understand that or not. God has gifted us with talents and spiritual gift for the purpose of serving Him and bringing Him glory and honor while we are alive on the earth. Even the angels who stand before God in Heaven understand that they are fellow servants with us.

Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Revelation 19:10

The angels in Heaven are “ministering spirits” who God sends forth “to minister for those who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). We see angels in the Bible going from Heaven to earth and back to Heaven continually to minister to the needs of God’s people. The angels minister to our needs even as we serve God during our lifetime here on earth. Whatever your ministry is now, it will be expanded in the future as you serve God by reigning with Christ on the earth.

The following verses in Revelation 19 (11-21) demonstrate the great power of Christ in defeating the kings of the earth and destroying their armies. The “beast” and “false prophet” who deceived those who received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image will be captured and cast alive into the lake of fire. The rest, the kings and armies of the earth, will be killed with the sword that proceeds from the mouth of Christ. They will remain dead until the time of their judgment.

We know that Jesus will rule on earth for a thousand years (Revelation 20:1-10). We will be “kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth,” so we might wonder what we’ll do during that time. It might depend on the talents and spiritual gifts God has given us. It might also include some of our interests and experiences from this current lifetime. What we do know is that we will serve Jesus Christ in whatever way He wants.

At the end of His thousand-year reign on earth, Jesus will allow Satan to be released from his prison in the “bottomless pit” and go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth – “Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number *is* as the sand of the sea” (Revelation 20:7-8). This army of people who had lived under Christ’s thousand-year reign will surround “the camp of the saints” and Jerusalem (the beloved city) and God will destroy them with fire that comes down from Heaven. Satan will then be cast into the lake of fire where the beast and false are and be “tormented day and night forever and ever.”

After that comes the Judgment – what we know as the Great White Throne Judgment.

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. Revelation 21:11-15

We know that Christ will reign from the Great White Throne as He judges the dead, “small and great.” We know that He will reign over the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21:1). We know that He will reign over the holy city, New Jerusalem, “coming down out of heaven from God” (Revelation 21:2-27). Anything else?

The Bible tells us a lot about God’s plans, but it doesn’t tell us everything. There are some things that God is keeping secret.

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.
Deuteronomy 29:29

New Heaven, New Earth, New Jerusalem

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Revelation 21:1-2

We know the first heaven and earth that God created will pass away, and that He will create a new heaven and new earth. God will also create a “New Jerusalem” that will come down out of Heaven and either sit on the earth or hover over the earth.

And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. Revelation 21:24-26

We know that Jesus Christ will reign over the new heaven, new earth, and New Jerusalem. We also know that we will reign with Him. We know that the new earth will not have any more “sea,” so that may mean the configuration of the new earth will be different than what we know now. It may be a giant land mass with water flowing through it like springs or rivers. Revelation does speak of the earth having kings, so it would make sense that large numbers of people would live on earth. They might receive water and food from the earth (similar to the Garden of Eden) or from Heaven.

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

Isaiah 65 and 66 mention a new heaven and new earth, but that prophecy has Israel in view. That raises the question about any differences in how Israel and the Church will work together in the new heaven and new earth. We know that the twelve apostles will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel when Jesus sits on the throne of His glory (Matthew 19:28). We also know that the New Jerusalem has a strong connection to Israel. The names written on the twelve gates of the City will each have the name of one of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. The wall of the City will have twelve foundations and each foundation will have the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Revelation 21).

The Apostle Paul was not one of the “twelve” apostles because he was saved at a later time and given the responsibility of being the Apostle to the Gentiles. That raises the question about what Paul and the Church (mostly made up of Gentiles) will be doing and where they will live “forever and ever.” We know that members of Christ’s Church will be with Jesus wherever He is, so that certainly includes the New Jerusalem. Anywhere else?

While the Bible details the current earth, new earth, and New Jerusalem, it doesn't say much about the "new heaven." What might God have planned for that new space?

The New Jerusalem comes down "out of heaven from God," so that gives us three distinct possible locations for Christians to live. One would be the new heaven. Another would be the New Jerusalem. One more would be the new earth.

I believe that Christians will abide with Christ wherever He rules. We will reign "with Him." That would include all locations since Jesus will reign over all three. The New Jerusalem certainly has a Jewish flavor, so that may be where Jews will live along with their prophets and apostles. The new earth mentions "kings of the earth," so that might be where non-Jews born during the Millennium may live and expand their families ("Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth"). It may be that the "one new man *from* the two" that the Apostle Paul wrote about in Ephesians 2 (the Church made up of Jews and Gentiles) will reign with Christ in all three places.

Christians are said to be heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8). We will also reign with Christ in the new Creation. We will also “serve God” in the New Creation. I think that combination of being joint heirs with Christ and servants of God may send us in many directions. Some Christians may serve on the new earth. Some may serve in the New Jerusalem. Some may serve in the new heaven.

Will the new heaven be like the current heaven (space above the earth)? We know from Revelation 21 that the New Jerusalem will have no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it. That’s because Jesus, the Lamb of God, will be the light of the city.

And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Revelation 21:24

Verse 25 says the gates of the city won't be shut at all by day and there won't be any night there. That tells us something about the New Jerusalem where Jesus Christ will reign, but what about the new heaven? Will the new heaven not have stars since our current sun is a star? Will the new heaven not have planets or moons? What kind of space will it be? Since we're told little about this new heaven, I look to the nature of God for answers.

God plans, then creates what is necessary to fulfill the plans. God planned the new heaven and earth before He created the first heaven and earth. I sometimes wonder if what Paul saw in the vision he mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12 might have been about the new heaven. The apostle wrote that he had been "caught up to the third heaven" fourteen years before writing the letter. He also called the place "Paradise." Paul said he heard inexpressible words that were "not lawful for a man to utter." He said that God gave him an "abundance of the revelations." I think God gave Paul multiple visions and revelations from the Lord to prepare him for the difficulties he would face as the apostle to the Gentiles. Fourteen years before writing 2 Corinthians would have been several years

before his first missionary journey, so we know Paul already knew many extraordinary things before he preached in Antioch of Syria and wrote his letters.

The visions and revelations Paul received may not have been the same ones the Apostle John received. Most of Revelation concerns Israel, which makes sense for John to have received it. Paul, on the other hand, received visions and revelations that concerned the Church – the Body of Christ. That’s why Paul knew things the other apostles didn’t know until they talked it out at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15; Galatians 2). They agreed that Paul would go to the Gentiles and John, Peter, and the other apostles to the Jews. That’s a primary reason I think the visions and revelations may be different. We also find differences in the letters of the apostles. Look at who the apostles addressed in each of their letters and what they referenced. Some of the apostles wrote to the “pilgrims of the Dispersion” (1 Peter 1) and “To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (James 1). Paul wrote to churches made up of primarily of Gentiles in various parts of the Roman Empire.

While John's vision of the Revelation connects strongly to Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel's future glory (e.g. Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel), Paul's visions and revelations connect to a "mystery" revealed through his teachings and letters. As he wrote in Ephesians 3:6, "that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel." God's promise that the nations of the world would be blessed through Abraham was well known by Jews and anyone who read Genesis. However, God's plan that Gentiles (non-Jews) would be "fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel" was a mystery God withheld until the time He chose to reveal it.

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.)" Ephesians 3:1-4

I think Paul received the mystery of God's plans for Gentiles when he (Paul) was caught up into Paradise (third heaven). Paul did not share any details of what he saw there because it was not lawful for him to speak (utter) it.

I wonder if what Paul saw is what I refer to as Revelation 23. Did Paul see the kinds of amazing things Christians would do in the new heaven? Did Paul see what new, creative things God might have in store for the joint heirs of Christ? Might God be planning to create new worlds beyond what we see in Revelation 21 and 22? I don't know because God doesn't tell us. However, He did tell and show Paul something that was unlawful for him to share at the time.

Another part of God's nature is that He is Almighty. God can do anything He wants to do. If His plan is to create new worlds in or beyond the new heaven, that's wonderful. If His plan is not to create anything beyond what is revealed in Revelation 21 and 22, that's wonderful as well. The important thing is that we will be with Him and serve Him forever and ever. We shall see His face forever and ever. His name will be on our foreheads forever and ever. We will reign with Christ forever and ever. What matters is what matters to God. We are His servants – forever and ever.

May we serve God now with the talents and spiritual gifts He has given us – all to His glory.

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

GraceLife © 1990-2022