

# EDEN RESTORED

## REVELATION 22

Daniel and Revelation Series

### OPENING PRAYER

Creator God, open our hearts to your Spirit of Truth, so that through these texts, our discussion and our prayer, we will hear the voice of your living Word. Through this Bible study, may our minds be renewed and our desire for your Kingdom quickened. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

### EXEGESIS

Revelation culminates with a vision of a new creation. Heaven and earth, the spiritual and material, are united a marriage. This is a marriage between God and God's people, between Jesus and the New Jerusalem. The creator and the created live in intimate union.

The New Jerusalem, with its twelve gates (tribes of Israel) and foundations (apostles of Jesus) represents the entirety of God's people. The measurements indicate that the city is a cube, a symbol of perfection. We have here a description of what human civilisation can be like when the slaughtered Lamb is enthroned at the centre, rather than the violent power of Caesar.

The riches of the city are not hoarded away in the hands of a few, they adorn the walls and streets in a display of common ownership. It is a place of freedom, for the gates are always open for people to come and go as they wish. There is clean water and abundant food, and healing medicinal plants for all people. Here is a harmonious working of human technology and the natural world. Significantly, there is no temple. God does not live in a special building, but is intimately present with God's people.

Although the doors never shut, not everything is admitted. Evil is condemned to a final annihilation, or perhaps a fire of purification, and nothing evil can enter the New Jerusalem. There is no night in the city of God, so nothing evil can occur under cover of darkness. The sea, symbolic of primordial chaos, is gone.

### REFLECTION

I once spent a week volunteering in a small intentional community - a group of people living together with a focus on eating and working together. For a few months at a time, people in times of crisis would join the rhythm of cooking, feeding the pigs and chopping wood. This was a place of healing and retreat. As I spent time listening to people's stories, making bread, cleaning out the chickens, and witnessing how the community resolved conflicts, it felt as though the kingdom of God was coming out the taps.

Not long after arriving at the community, I encountered a volunteer having a difficult conversation with a visitor. It's a dry community. No alcohol or illegal drugs can be used on site, and no one can visit whilst under the influence. This visitor had smoked something they shouldn't have, and had to be sent away. The rule is clear and unbendable. When the community has guests grappling with addiction, for their own healing they need an alcohol and drug free environment. Such a place of healing can only exist when protected by boundaries and demands tempered by love.

In the New Jerusalem, everyone is welcome, and there will never be a moment when someone is forever shut off from the possibility of healing and forgiveness. The open gates are balanced with the fact that nothing unclean can enter. Welcome is balanced with boundaries and demands, mercy with justice. It's a tricky balance that can only be achieved with careful discernment. We've got it wrong many times before.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is this a vision of the future, or is it a reality that we can experience now?
2. Where have you experienced God's new creation breaking through?
3. When has the Church got the balance of mercy and justice wrong?

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## CLOSING PRAYER

Lord God, may we be guided by your Light into your new creation to dwell with you. As a community, faithful to you, may we embody mercy and justice, nourishment and healing, welcoming everyone to join us at the feasting table of the Lamb. In the name of the resurrected Jesus, Amen.

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## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Michael J. Gorman, 'Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation' (2011)