

# The Tree of Life

Rev 22:1-9

SS Lesson for 05/29/2011

**Devotional Scripture:** Gen 2:8-14

## OUTLINE

### INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND APPROACH TO LESSON

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

*From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*

*From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator*

### MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

THE RIVER, TREE AND THE SAINTS (REV 22:1-5)

*Commentary on Rev 22:1 by Tony Garland*

*Commentary on Rev 22:2 by Tony Garland*

*Commentary on Rev 22:4 by Tony Garland*

TRUSTWORTHINESS OF GOD'S WORD (REV 22:6-9)

*Nature of the trustworthiness (6-9)*

Faithful and true

Faithful because God is faithful in His calls (1 Cor 1:9)

Faithful because God will do what He promises (1 Thess 5:24)

Faithful because Jesus is faithful over God's house (Heb 3:6)

Spoken by Angels (Heb 2:1-2)

It will happen quickly (James 5:8)

Worthy of worship

Worthy of worship because of the message from God (Josh 5:13-14)

Man should not worship angels (Col 2:18)

God is the only one to worship (Matt 4:10)

Requires response of discipleship (1 Cor 3:5-9)

### CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR

PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR

HEART OF THE LESSON FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR

*The description of the tree (Rev. 22:1-2)*

*The description of the day (Rev. 22:3-5)*

*The declaration of Christ (Rev. 22:6-9)*

# Introduction

## **Overview and Approach to Lesson**

The lesson detail and outline came from a previous SS Lessons dated 05/20/2007 and 05/27/2007. This week's lesson describes **The Tree of Life**. The study's aim is to realize we worship our Lord Jesus because He alone can help us partake of the tree of life. The study's application is to understand that the tree of life is available to all who are willing to receive it.

## **Lesson Introduction and Background**

### **From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

#### *Where There's Water, There's Life*

When scientists sent probes to the surface of Mars, they eagerly anticipated finding the answer to an old question: Is there water—and life—on Mars? They thought that maybe if there were ice hidden under the rocks, then there might be some evidence of microscopic life. Their line of thought was based on this earthly observation: where there's water, there's life. It is true that life on earth depends on water. Even desert creatures have to have some water—the water that was lovingly provided by the Creator. We cannot imagine life existing without it. Therefore, it is fitting that God should provide “the river of the water of life” to sustain the inhabitants of Heaven. The abundance of this life-giving water, flowing like a river from the throne of God, means that it is a plentiful supply that will never run out. For this water—for this life—God is to be forever worshiped and praised.

#### *Lesson Background*

Today's lesson is from the final chapter of the great Revelation that was given to John in his exile on the island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9). It is the victorious culmination of all the scenes of struggle that preceded. Beyond the great judgment scene of chapter 20, God's people come to enjoy the new Heaven and new earth of chapter 21 (Lesson 12). The final chapter shows God providing the water of life and the tree of life—everything necessary to sustain eternal life for his people. The curse is lifted; paradise is regained. Perhaps it is also appropriate as part of the Lesson Background to review the biblical truth that God's people will have bodies in Heaven, bodies that will drink the water of life and eat from the tree of life. The New Testament is emphatic that the dead in Christ shall rise from the dead just as Jesus did (1 Thessalonians 4:14–16), that they will have a new kind of body (1 Corinthians 15:35–54), and that this body will be fashioned to be like Christ's glorious body (Philippians 3:21). It will be just as Job knew so long ago: after his body has been destroyed, “Yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another” (Job 19:26, 27).

### **From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

Our thinking is framed by our limitations. We have a hard time thinking beyond the limitations within which we live and work. Sometimes the limitations are cultural - language, values, customs, traditions, and routines. Sometimes they are geographical and climatic. These limitations can be overcome to some degree as we travel abroad or expand our education. Our minds learn to think more broadly and grasp greater possibilities. But some limitations are merely human, and no matter what our culture or location may be, we still have to think as finite earthlings. These and other limitations make it impossible for us fully to understand God and the cosmic plan He is unfolding. But His Word gives us glimpses into this plan, especially in prophetic Scripture, and we stand astonished and humbled. The final chapter of Revelation gives us one such glimpse into the eternal future and the New Jerusalem. It should lead us to worship God even more humbly than we have before. With our lesson this week we conclude this unit with a final focus on worship within the context of the tree of life. We explore how we can partake of the tree of life, and we recognize that Jesus is the One to be worshiped. Most of us have at some point in our lives experienced the power of being in the pure, overwhelming presence of God when we worship Him. One does not experience that kind of strong and holy emotion when standing before an inanimate idol. The glory of God fills the

place as we truly know the One whom we worship. It is a special feeling. The three disciples felt that way when Jesus was transfigured before them on the mountaintop, and they did not want to leave. The overpowering presence of God was around and in them. This week we explore what we will experience when God is the center of our lives. The river of life flows from Him. He is the source of our strength, and He gives us life itself.

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### ***The River, Tree and the Saints (Rev 22:1-5)***

- 1 And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.
- 2 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.
- 3 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.
- 4 They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.
- 5 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.

### **Commentary on Rev 22:1 by Tony Garland**

In the previous chapter, John was shown a new order of things. An entirely new heaven and earth were created to replace the first heaven and earth which fled away at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11). In addition to the new heaven and new earth, John saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, descending from heaven as a bride for the Lamb (Rev. 21:2, 9). John's vision was given in two parts. The first part provided an overview of the eternal order (Rev. 21:1-8). In the second part, an angel accompanied John on a more detailed tour of the New Jerusalem, providing additional information and measurements of the city. In many ways, the chapter break at Revelation 21:27 is unfortunate because the first five verses of this chapter should really be considered as the conclusion of John's detailed tour of the New Jerusalem.

#### ***he showed me***

This is the angel who first accompanied John "in the Spirit" to show him the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God (Rev. 21:10). This is one of the angels having the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues (Rev. 21:9). It may be the same angel which took him "in the Spirit" to see the great harlot, Babylon (Rev. 17:3). The tour contrasts the New Jerusalem, the city of God, with Babylon, the city of man.

#### ***a pure river of water of life***

This is the fountain of the water of life which God promised to the thirsty in the previous chapter (Rev. 21:6). Its ultimate source is God Himself, for it proceeds from His throne (cf. Ps. 36:8-9; 46:4).

A similar river will flow from under the threshold of the Millennial Temple (Eze. 47:1-2; Zec. 14:8), but that river does not reach all regions, so sin remains in the Millennium (Eze. 47:11). Now, sin is no more and life abounds in all parts of the new creation.

#### ***clear as crystal***

The purity and clarity of the water is remarkable to John. The clarity speaks of sinlessness and symbolizes the cleansing from sin of those who partake of the river. Although this is a literal river in the eternal state, it also typifies the Holy Spirit Who cleanses and gives life to those who trust Christ in this age (John 4:10; 7:37-38). In the eternal state, there is no more death because there is no more sin (Rev. 21:4).

When John first ascended to the throne room in heaven, he saw the sea of glass like crystal, in the midst of the throne (Rev. 4:6). The sea of glass probably symbolized this river which would be the basis of cleansing and eternal life in the new heaven and earth. Although the nations will partake of the tree of life, the tree itself draws from this river of life (cf. Ps. 1:3).

***proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb***

The river proceeds from the throne because the source of all life is ultimately God (Job 33:4; Eze. 37:9; John 1:4; 14:6; Acts 3:15; Rev. 11:11).

*There is no sea from which waters are raised by the sun, as in the present hydrologic cycle (Rev. 21:1) and thus no rainfall to supply the river with its flow. Rather, it proceeds “out of the throne of God and of the Lamb,” high at the central pinnacle of the holy city. Evidently the mighty Creator is continually creating the waters, then sending them forth to give perpetual life and cleansing and beauty to the city and its inhabitants, and then on out into the uttermost parts of the new earth.<sup>1</sup>*

The throne is of God and of the Lamb. In the eternal state, there is no more distinction between the throne of the Father in heaven and that of the Son on earth (Matt. 25:31; Rev. 3:21). Jesus rules from the Davidic throne during the Millennial Kingdom until the last enemy, death, is destroyed (Rev. 20:14). Then, He delivers the kingdom to God the Father (1Cor. 15:24-26) and the throne of David merges with the heavenly throne of the Father (Rev. 22:3) and both the Father and the Son continue to rule forever.

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Notes

1 Henry Morris, *The Revelation Record* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1983), Rev. 22:1.

**Commentary on Rev 22:2 by Tony Garland**

***In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life***

The Greek lacks the article: the tree. There are several trees, each of them a tree of life. “It was not one individual tree, but a particular tree as to its kind, as we speak of ‘the apple’ or ‘the oak,’ denoting a species of which there are many specimens.”<sup>1</sup> There may have been exactly three trees, or John saw three groups of trees of the same kind in each of the three areas. What John sees is very similar to what Ezekiel saw during the Millennium, but Ezekiel’s trees were not the tree of life, but other nourishing trees which provide long life during the Millennial Kingdom (Isa. 65:20):

*Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine. (Eze. 47:12)*

Medicine (Eze. 47:12) is תרופה [terûphāh] : either from the root ריף [rûph] , to make small as in medical powder, or from פָּאָר [rāphā`] , to heal.<sup>2</sup> Translated by ὑγίεια [hybieia] in the LXX: health, soundness of body. During the Millennium, the leaves of the trees near the river will provide for the physical healing of the peoples, but it is important to recognize that these trees cannot be the tree of life. Those who consume the leaves live to an advanced age, but do not avoid death (Isa. 65:20).<sup>3</sup>

Jesus said to the church at Ephesus that He would give the overcomer “to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). He alluded to the original placement of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9) and indicated that the redeemed would once more have access to the tree in a future paradise—the eternal state which John now sees. Those who do His commandments (or wash their robes , MT and NU texts) will have authority to access the tree of life (Rev. 22:14). Those who take away from the words of the book of this prophecy will have their part taken away from the tree of life (Rev. 22:19, MT and NU texts). Evidently, access to the tree of life is one and the same as salvation and indicates that all who inhabit the eternal state will have access to the tree on an equal basis.

When man rebelled in the Garden of Eden, he was cut off from the tree of life (Gen. 3:22-24). Since then, death has reigned over all peoples, even the people of God—with few exceptions. We rejoice in the fact that in the redemptive counsels of God, history is to be brought full circle to affect a full return to a Paradise without death which was previously lost:

*The harmonious unity of Scripture is herein exhibited. The Fathers compared it to a ring, an unbroken circle, returning into itself. Between the events of Genesis and those at the close of the Apocalypse, at least six thousand or seven thousand years intervene; and between Moses the first writer and John the last about one thousand five hundred years. How striking it is that, as in the beginning we found Adam and Eve, his bride, in innocence in Paradise, then tempted by the serpent, and driven from the tree of life, and from the pleasant waters of Eden, yet not without a promise of a Redeemer who should crush the serpent; so at the close, the old serpent cast out for ever by the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, who appears with His Bride, the Church, in a better Paradise, and amidst better waters (Rev. 22:1): the tree of life also is there with all its healing properties, not guarded with a flaming sword, but open to all who overcome (Rev. 2:7), and there is no more curse.<sup>4</sup>*

*All worlds move in circles; and the grand march of God's providence with man moves in one immense round. It starts with Paradise, and thence moves out through strange and untried paths, until it has fulfilled its grand revolution by coming back to the point from which it started; not indeed to repeat itself, but thenceforward to rest forever in the results of that wonderful experiment. Genesis is the Book of beginnings; the Revelation is the Book of the endings of what was then begun; and the last laps back upon the first, and welds the two ends of the history into a golden ring of eternity.<sup>5</sup>*

During this present age, where physical death has not yet been abolished, those who follow after God are likened to a fruitful tree typified by the tree of life near the river of living water which John sees in the eternal state.<sup>6</sup>

*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. (Ps. 1:1-3)*

Between the Fall in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:22-24) and the creation of the new heavens and earth (Rev. 21:1), the cross of Jesus Christ is the tree of life for all who trust in His redeeming work (Acts 5:30; Gal. 3:13; 1Pe. 2:24).

#### ***which bore twelve fruits***

Which bore is ποιοῦν [poioun] , present tense participle: continually making. The text implies fruit is continuously being produced from which we can conclude it is also being consumed on an ongoing basis.

#### ***each tree yielding***

Yielding is ἀποδιδούν [apodidoun] , present tense participle: continually giving out.

#### ***every month***

The tree produces fruit on a monthly basis. Its ongoing production implies an ongoing consumption of the fruit by the nations, although this is not explicitly said. In the Millennial Kingdom, the fruit of similar trees were used for food (Eze. 47:12), whereas their leaves were used for medicine. In the eternal state, John sees the leaves used for healing, but nothing is said concerning the use of the fruit. We can probably assume the nations will eat of the fruit of the tree. This should not be surprising since Jesus, in His resurrected body, continued to eat food (John 21:12; Acts 10:41).<sup>7</sup>

*And whether they need it for the support of their undecaying immortality or not, [partaking of the Tree of Life] is everywhere presented as one of the most precious*

*privileges of God's glorified saints. We cannot suppose that they ever hunger or thirst in that high realm, or that there is ever any waste in their immortal energies needing recuperation from physical digestion; but still the participation of these Life-fruits bespeaks a communion with Life, the joy of which exceeds all present comprehension.*<sup>8</sup>

The mention of months may imply that the sun and moon, although not needed for light in the vicinity of the New Jerusalem, continue to exist within the eternal state.<sup>9</sup>

*The fact that months are identified as such in [the] New Jerusalem indicates that the orbital and rotational motions of the earth will go on as God established in the very beginning and that the moon likewise will continue orbiting around the earth.*<sup>10</sup>

The productivity of the tree in eternity is a model of what the Christian life is to be now. Believers are to be continuously yielding spiritual fruit, much of which is also for the healing of the nations. God expects productivity from all who would serve Him (cf. Matt. 21:19; Mark 11:13).<sup>11</sup> In the same way the tree of life yields fruit because of its position next to the river of life, so must the productive Christian abide in Christ:

*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (John 15:4-5)*

#### ***The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations***

Healing is *θεραπείαν* [therapeian] : which can also denote “serving, service, care.”<sup>12</sup> The leaves, in some way, provide “prosperity for the nations.”<sup>13</sup>

Jesus taught that all who exist in the eternal state with a glorified body are equal to the angels and cannot die (Luke 20:35-36). But here, John is shown the tree of life and told: “the leaves of the tree of life were for the healing of the nations.” Even if healing (*θεραπείαν* [therapeian] ) is taken to mean service (Luke 12:42; Matt. 24:45), there is still the question as to why the nations would need ongoing access to the tree of life? And if the nations access the tree in relation to life, how does that square with Jesus’ teaching that those who have been glorified cannot die?

Similar questions confront us in the book of Genesis, before the Fall into sin. Adam and Eve are in the Garden of Eden, in a state of sinless perfection, and are given access to the tree of life (Gen. 2:9, 16). Later, when they disobey God, their access to the tree is cut off lest they eat of it and live forever (Gen. 3:22-24). Several things are implied by the Genesis account: (1) the tree of life served a purpose in the Garden of Eden prior to the entrance of sin and death; (2) Adam and Eve undoubtedly partook of the fruit of the tree before their fall into sin since it was permitted; (3) had Adam and Eve continued to eat from the tree after their fall into sin, then they would never have died. It seems that ongoing access to the tree provided eternal life. But how does this fit with the abundant Scriptural teaching that death is a result of sin (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:12-15, 21; 6:16, 23; 7:5, 11-13; 8:2; Jas. 1:15)? In the absence of sin, both in the Garden of Eden before the Fall and in the eternal state, what purpose does the tree of life serve?

*Why would healing be necessary in eternity? What is the meaning of the healing leaves? What is their purpose? Admittedly these questions are puzzling. However, the concept of healing leaves need not imply sickness. The tree of life existed in the Garden of Eden before sin and sickness (Gen. 2:9; 3:22), and it can also exist in the New Jerusalem without illness. After all, there will be no curse there (Rev. 22:3).*<sup>14</sup>

*Healing, however, does not necessarily indicate the presence of disease any more than the wiping away of tears (Rev. 21:4) implies that sorrow still exists in the new Jerusalem. The tears were those caused by the troubles of this creation, tears that will no longer exist in the new creation. Likewise, the disease for which this healing provides is that of the former creation which no longer exists in the new Jerusalem.*<sup>15</sup>

With such an understanding, we can suggest a relationship between the tree of life, sin, and death. The tree of life serves as a source from which sinless men obtain life. They do not attain eternal life in any sort of independent manner, but are completely and forever dependent upon God, the ultimate source of life. This dependence is reflected in their need to access the fruit from the tree for its life-giving qualities. The moment sin enters into the picture, as it did in the Garden and which it can never do again in eternity, independence of God results.<sup>16</sup> When sin entered in the Garden of Eden and independence from God with it, God saw fit to remove access to the tree of life—the very channel by which He had chosen to dispense eternal life. The result was death. To summarize: sin brought independence from God which was manifest in being cut off from the tree of life resulting in death. In the eternal state, man will be sinless and have eternal life, but the creation and the creature will always and forever remain dependent upon the Creator as the source of life. The ongoing need to access the tree of life for eternity reflects the continued dependence of the creatures upon the Creator—a reality which God has chosen to manifest via the tree.

Some attempt to avoid these questions by taking the tree of life as symbolic of salvation and spiritual life, and not as a real tree in a real eternal city. However, there are numerous reasons why the tree in the New Jerusalem should be taken as a literal tree:

*Some interpreters view the tree as only symbolic. But a literal view of the tree is proper for two reasons. First, since there was a literal tree of life in the historical Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9; 3:22, 24), it is possible for this tree also to be literal. Second, if the city, walls, gates, street, river, and light are literal (and the most reasonable evidence shows that they are), then the tree of life is most likely literal also. However, viewing the tree as literal does not exclude its also having symbolic significance for those who see it and eat of it. Just as the literal walls and foundations of the New Jerusalem will be memorials to Israel and to the apostles (Rev. 21:12, 14), so the tree of life can have a memorial function also.<sup>17</sup>*

Even those who take the tree literally struggle with the idea that healing should be found in the tree. Some propose that the healing relates to the maintenance of a population among the faithful who still reside in natural bodies in eternity. The “healing problem,” along with the possible differences between the nations and kings of the earth which reside outside the city versus the glorified saints within the city, have caused some to suggest that the nations in the eternal state may be made up of humans in their natural bodies living in conditions much like that of the original creation. This might answer some of the puzzles which are before us: why God created a new heaven and earth, why there are gates to the city which infer some are primarily occupied outside and others inside, and why the tree of life remains if only glorified saints remain? Several expositors suggest such a solution, as we discussed in our commentary on Revelation 21:24. For example:

*There are two classes of people who will live eternally upon the earth: (1) the saints, who as co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17) are given glorified bodies (1Cor. 15:52), who possess the kingdom (Dan. 7:18) and rule over the kingdom (Rev. 20:4, 6) as its inheritors (Matt. 25:34); (2) natural people, described here [1Cor. 15:52] as “flesh and blood” who are the eternal subjects of the kingdom, who eternally perpetuate the natural race of earthly men in the flesh (Ps. 72:5; Isa. 59:21; Eze. 37:25; Luke 1:32-33. 2Pe. 3:13).<sup>18</sup>*

*Two classes of people are thus distinctly recognized in the new heaven and earth;—a class in glory who get the fruits of the Tree of Life, and a class in the estate of “nations” who get the leaves; but, whether fruits or leaves, a great and glorious blessing. . . . The meaning is not that the nations are full of sicknesses and ailments; for these remains of the curse are gone then, though it may be from the virtue of these leaves. The meaning rather is the preservation of health and comfort, and not that maladies then exist to be removed. The Life-leaves are for the conservation and augmentation of the Life-blessedness of men on earth, as the Life-fruits are for the joy of the saints in heaven.<sup>19</sup>*

One objection to such a view is found in Paul's statement: "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption" (1Cor. 15:50). Although Jesus referred to his resurrected body as "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39), it was clearly a different body than that which Adam and Eve had in their natural state. Jesus' resurrected body is the sort of incorruptible body which the saints will inherit when glorified. There is no corruption in the eternal state, for sin shall be no more. And so it was in the Garden of Eden before the fall of Adam and Eve. But the prohibition against flesh and blood in the ultimate kingdom of God—beyond the millennium—would seem to be at odds with a restoration of the conditions in the Garden of Eden. Some try to get around the plain meaning of Paul's statement by postulating two classes of peoples in the eternal state: those with glorified bodies who rule and reign and those in natural bodies who are their subjects.<sup>20</sup> But such a proposition seems without support in Scripture which knows of only one class among the redeemed in eternity: those who inherit the kingdom, obtain eternal life, are granted the right to enter the city, and partake of the tree of life. The promise to the overcomer at the church of Ephesus and the last blessing of all of Scripture, at the close of the book, imply that all the faithful are of a single class in regard to their access to the tree of life:

*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. "To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." (Rev. 2:7)*

*Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. (Rev. 21:14)*

These are the redeemed, those who obtain eternal life by faith in Christ. The promises they obtain are described in terms which match that of the nations and kings of the earth in the eternal state who bring their glory and honor through the gates into the city (Rev. 21:24-26) and partake of the tree of life (Rev. 22:2). Dividing up access to the tree of life into two classes, some in glorified bodies who partake of the fruit and others in unglorified bodies which partake of the leaves is without Scriptural support.

*The suggestion that partaking of the Tree of Life pertains to the citizens within the city and entrance through the city's gates relates to the nations, is also faulty. Both are relevant to all believers: authority over the Tree of Life and access to the way that leads to it.<sup>21</sup>*

A better solution is to understand the mention of nations and kings of the earth, which come in through the gate to the New Jerusalem, as merely a description of the identity of the redeemed from among the nations and as emphasizing their right to access the holy city which has been their ultimate hope and destiny all along (John 14:2-3; Gal. 4:25-26; Heb. 11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14; Rev. 3:12).

The proposal that human beings, in natural bodies, continue to populate the eternal state as separate peoples from the glorified saints seems to raise as many issues as it attempts to solve.<sup>22</sup> Nor does it account for the ultimate unity among the redeemed of eternity in its proposal that flesh and blood can inherit the eternal kingdom of God. Neither does it provide additional insight into the purpose of the tree of life in the eternal state because it proposes conditions no different than those in the Garden of Eden for which the mystery of the need for a tree of life during conditions of sinless perfection remains. As intriguing as the view may be to some, it seems to go beyond Scripture and fails to provide significant benefit in an understanding of eternity.

Probably all that we can safely conclude is that the healing provided by the leaves of the tree provides some sort of service to the inhabitants of the eternal state. Exactly what that service is, we are not in a position to ascertain. Since the tree provides both fruit and leaves, the leaves may have a purpose unrelated to eating from the tree:

*The third and preferred explanation is that the healing leaves may represent spiritual service or care. The Greek word for healing is *θεραπεία* [*therapeia*] , "serving, service, care," from the verb *θεραπεύω* [*therapeuō*] , "to serve, be a servant." Liddell, Scott, and Jones list many examples where this term refers to serving and has no connection with illness or the need for healing. Only in the sense of care, treatment, or serving the sick did it come to be applied to "healing" or*

*“curing,” as in “therapy” and “therapeutic.” True, the word is used in Revelation 13:3, 12 of a wound healed; but in Luke 12:42 it is used of “service” of a faithful and wise steward, and in Acts 17:25 for serving God. The leaves, then, are there to minister to or serve the redeemed as they serve God (Rev. 22:3).<sup>23</sup>*

*The chemical ingredients of the rich foliage of the trees might be available for innumerable uses in the economy of the nations which is to be kept healthy by the leaves of the tree.<sup>24</sup>*

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Notes

- 1 J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 505.
- 2 Wilhelm Gesenius, and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2003, 1810-1812), 874.
- 3 “The trees in both cases line the river; but in the earthly order they are outside the city; and though bread trees, they are not the Tree of Life. The heavenly River issues not from the sanctuary but from the throne. It does not flow into the sea, but through the avenues and streets of the city.”—Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, 506.
- 4 A. R. Fausset, “The Revelation of St. John the Divine,” in Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, 1877), Rev. 22:2.
- 5 Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, 503.
- 6 “The tree of life is mentioned four times in Proverbs (Pr. 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4), metaphorically depicting wisdom, fruitful works, hope, and the benefits of the wise use of the tongue.”—Daniel K. Wong, “The Tree of Life in Revelation 2:7,” in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 155 no. 618 (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, April-June 1998), 211.
- 7 “The Saviour after his glorious resurrection did eat, even of the course food of mortals. The angels did eat of Sarah’s cakes and of Abraham’s dressed calf (Gen. 18:6-8).”—Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, 506.
- 8 Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, 507.
- 9 Fruchtenbaum believes a monthly calendar will continue, but without the benefit of the moon: “It should be noted that the word month is used, so some kind of dating system will be present in the Eternal Order. Since there will be no sun, moon, or night, it will be a radically different dating system than the one in which we presently live.”—Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of Messiah*, rev ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 539.
- 10 Henry Morris, *The Revelation Record* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1983), Rev. 22:2.
- 11 We speak here of productivity as measured by God, not the constant activity which so often characterizes Christian work, which has more in common with Martha than Mary (Luke 10:38-42).
- 12 Frederick William Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 358.
- 13 Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 196.
- 14 Wong, “The Tree of Life in Revelation 2:7,” 219.
- 15 Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), Rev. 22:2.
- 16 A viable definition of sin is simply independence from God.
- 17 Wong, “The Tree of Life in Revelation 2:7,” 213.
- 18 Jerome Smith, *The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), 1Cor. 15:50.
- 19 Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, 507.
- 20 “Those who argue that ‘flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom’ (1Cor. 15:50) forget that these natural generations are subjects of the kingdom, not inheritors, for only the resurrected saints in glorified bodies are co-heirs with Christ in His eternal kingdom (Rom. 8:17).”—Smith, *The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, 2Pe. 3:13.
- 21 Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, Rev. 22:14.

22 “There is no indication whatever in Scripture that resurrected and translated beings have the quality of human sex, much less the capacity to produce offspring.”—John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1966), Rev. 21:24.

23 Wong, “The Tree of Life in Revelation 2:7,” 220-221.

24 Morris, *The Revelation Record*, Rev. 22:2.

### Commentary on Rev 22:4 by Tony Garland

#### *They shall see His face*

They shall see is ὄψονται [opsontai] , middle tense: they themselves will see. The saints will see His face firsthand!

The full glory of God has never been available to sinful man, for God’s fire consumes sin (Ex. 24:17; Num. 16:35; Deu. 4:24; Heb. 12:29). Therefore, God has never been seen fully by men in the flesh (1Jn. 4:12). When God met with the children of Israel “face to face” on Mount Sinai, His presence was so terrifying that the children of Israel requested that Moses mediate between them and God (Deu. 5:4-5). Even Moses, whom God later said He spoke with “face to face” (Ex. 33:11; Num. 12:8; Deu. 34:10), was afraid to look upon God:

*Moreover He said, “I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. (Ex. 3:6)*

When Moses asked to see the glory of the Lord, God only permitted him a passing glimpse in order that he might not be consumed:

*But He said, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.” And the Lord said, “Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen.” (Ex. 33:20-23)*

Many times, God was represented in the first person by the Angel of the Lord, the preincarnate Jesus Christ (John 1:18). Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the Lord and called the place Peniel (face of God) because he had seen God face to face, but lived (Gen. 32:30). But this was not God’s unveiled glory. When Elijah fled from Jezebel to Mount Horeb, when he sensed God’s presence, he took care to wrap his face in his mantle lest he see God’s glory directly (1K. 19:13). When Isaiah saw God in the heavenly Temple, he realized he would be consumed because of his sinful state. But a seraph flew to him with a coal and cleansed his sin (Isa. 6:5-7).

As early as the book of Job, it has been the hope and dream of the redeemed to see God firsthand:

*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19:25-27)*

The psalmist also understood that one day, in a righteous state, he would see God’s face:

*As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness. (Ps. 17:15)*

In the scene before John, the many promises of Jesus that the righteous would have intimacy with God, now find their fulfillment:

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (Matt. 5:8)*

*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14:3)*

*Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24)*

Paul and John also looked forward to this day:

*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. (1Cor. 13:12)*

*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (1Jn. 3:2-3)*

***His name shall be on their foreheads.***

Jesus told the church at Philadelphia that the overcomer would have three names written upon him: (1) the name of God; (2) the name of the New Jerusalem; and (3) Jesus' new name (Rev. 3:12). His name was written on the forehead of the 144,000 Jews of the Tribulation (Rev. 7:3; 14:1). In a similar way to which the Beast worshipers received the mark of the Beast as an indication of their identity with the Beast (Rev. 13:16), the servants of God will be dedicated to Him. This name upon their foreheads recalls the dedication of the high priest who wore a plate of gold upon his headdress which was engraved: "HOLINESS TO THE LORD" (Ex. 28:36).

### ***Trustworthiness of God's Word (Rev 22:6-9)***

6 Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place.

7 "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

8 Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things.

9 Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

### **Nature of the trustworthiness (6-9)**

*Faithful and true*

***Faithful because God is faithful in His calls (1 Cor 1:9)***

9 God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

***Faithful because God will do what He promises (1 Thess 5:24)***

24 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

***Faithful because Jesus is faithful over God's house (Heb 3:6)***

6 But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.

*Spoken by Angels (Heb 2:1-2)*

2:1 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. 2 For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment,

*It will happen quickly (James 5:8)*

8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

### *Worthy of worship*

#### *Worthy of worship because of the message from God (Josh 5:13-14)*

13 Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" 14 "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"

#### *Man should not worship angels (Col 2:18)*

18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.

#### *God is the only one to worship (Matt 4:10)*

10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

### *Requires response of discipleship (1 Cor 3:5-9)*

5 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe — as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

## **Conclusion and Other Thoughts**

### ***Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary***

When we think of Heaven, it is only natural, perhaps, to focus our attention on the abundance of the blessings that await us there. The water of life, necessary to sustain us, will flow like a river from the throne of God. The tree of life, provided for our sustenance, will bear a new crop monthly. The incredible wealth, depicted as jewels, pearls, and streets of gold, dazzles our imagination. The paradise of Eden is not lost forever. It will be recovered—and more! Heaven is not just a recovery. It is the final perfection of what humanity enjoyed in the beginning. God still wants to bless us with abundant life. Jesus will fulfill his promise that he will give us life more abundantly (John 10:10). When John saw a glimpse of all that awaits the faithful, he could only say, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20). The best thing about Heaven, however, will be immediate access to God. The full fellowship of Eden will be regained when God lives personally among his people (Revelation 21:3), when Jesus returns to take us to be with him (John 14:3). Jesus prayed on the night before his death that people would believe in him and thereby have fellowship with God (John 17:20–24). We begin to experience this kind of fellowship with God when we walk according to his commands (1 John 1:3, 5, 6). We also begin to experience fellowship with the divine in the presence of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13, 14; Philippians 2:1). The full abundance of fellowship with God, however, will come only in Heaven. At last we will be able to see the God whom we love and worship. At last we will be able to fulfill the very purpose of our own creation. At last our souls will be at rest, when we finally have returned home to God.

### ***Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator***

I enjoy gardening. Some make the same claim, but a couple of zinnias and spindly marigolds is not a garden. Others feel it is not a manly hobby. But I am certain God gave that job to the first man, and I carry on the grand tradition. In the spring, seed and plant catalogs begin to fill my mailbox, and I enjoy seeing the new varieties being offered. Hybridizers have done some wonderful things. You can purchase trees that

grow three or four different varieties of fruit, but none compare to the tree John described in Revelation 22. John described a crystal river flowing from the throne and running down the streets of the city, flanked on each side by the tree of life. You should remember that tree. There was one in the Garden of Eden along with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Ezekiel described the tree of life in chapter 47 of his prophecy. He also de-scribed the river in great detail. In John's vision, the tree of life is described as a landscaping element as well as a fruit producer. Twelve different fruits from one tree—amazing! I would have been concerned about storing seeds from the original garden or perhaps taking several cuttings and preserving them. But the God who made the universe will not be limited when He makes a new heaven and a new earth. There is no reason to make the river or the tree symbolic, although they are greatly illustrative of the purity and beauty of God. How easily one could note that they picture the provision of God for His people—water and food. The passage is difficult because it mentions that the leaves are for the healing of the nations. Why would God need to provide a tree with medicinal qualities to those who have new bodies and will live forever? The honest truth is that I do not know. It is difficult to explain a place that is like the earth we now know but without the curse. We can simply observe what God says He has prepared for His people, and I can hardly wait to see it. God will provide all His people's needs. And since He is the Creator and Architect of the universe, you would expect Him to do a great job of landscaping too. Do not miss this about the new world that is coming. It is real. It will not be a fantasy world or a figment of man's imagination. The details John described were not meant to merely symbolize deep truths. He described a real river and real trees, and you and I will enjoy all God has prepared. "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). John did his best in describing the indescribable! Perhaps his fingers trembled, knowing he was providing details about the place where all believers would someday live and worship. His description excites us, and it must have excited him as he wrote, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

### ***Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator***

1. When we need refreshment and renewal, only Christ can abundantly satisfy us (Rev. 22:1)
2. God is the Provider of limitless nourishment and healing in the lives of His people (vs. 2)
3. The evil and accursed cannot abide in God's presence; so let us always draw close to Him (vs. 3)
4. Christ has revealed God to us and placed His mark of ownership on our minds and hearts (vs. 4-5)
5. We assure ourselves of God's blessing by studying and applying His Word, especially as revealed in Revelation (vs. 6-7)
6. We must always be vigilant that our worship is reserved for God and God alone (vs. 8-9)

### ***Heart of the Lesson from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator***

Many children grow up climbing trees. Usually boys like it most, but some girls do too. Most of those who enjoy climbing trees would say, "The taller the better!" This lesson takes a look at a special tree mentioned in the last chapter of the last book of the Bible: the tree of life.

#### **The description of the tree (Rev. 22:1-2)**

This is not the first time the tree of life is mentioned. Genesis 2 and 3 is the other significant time it is mentioned. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were no longer permitted to eat from it (3:24). In this final vision in Revelation, John sees the tree of life. It is said to produce twelve different types of fruit, which are ripe every month. In addition, the leaves are "for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 22:2). That is an interesting statement. It does not seem to refer to healing from anything related to sin, for in the eternal state there is no more sin. John is quoting from Ezekiel 47:12: "By the river upon the bank . . . shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, . . . and the leaf thereof [is] for medicine." John "is not implying that there will be illness in the new earth; he is emphasizing that the Water of Life produces health and strength wherever it goes" (Life Application Study Bible, Tyndale).

**The description of the day (Rev. 22:3-5)**

Anyone who has ever been to Alaska knows about the very different seasons there with respect to daylight. Especially in the northern part of the state, there is very little nighttime in the summer months. In fact, to facilitate sleep, people use room-darkening shades. For those of us who live in the lower forty-eight, that is hard to understand. But in heaven, there will be no night ever. Yet it will not be because the sun is shining all the time; rather, "the Lord God [will give] them light." This should come as no surprise, for there are many references to God in the Bible that associate Him with light. Perhaps the best-known is found in I John 1:5: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

**The declaration of Christ (Rev. 22:6-9)**

Some may think that verse 7 seems out of place. It is a statement by the Lord amid other statements and observations that John makes. But it is not out of place. It is an often-repeated reminder in the book of Revelation that Jesus is coming back soon. The Holy Spirit put it here to remind us that Christ is indeed coming back. When a parent with small children has to go out of town for a few days, he will assure his youngsters that he will be back. Even if he calls them every day he is away, the children may still constantly ask their mother, "When is Dad coming back?" Jesus has told us He is coming back. Over and over He has promised that He is returning. We have it in writing. He says so at the end of Revelation, but the promise is evident in many places. That is tremendously comforting, especially in the world we live in today. There is so much turmoil; yet we need not fear. Christ is coming back! The only question is, Are we ready? As we await Christ's return, we should be encouraged to know that the tree of life is available to every Christian now by faith in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. His life in us will bear much fruit for the healing of the sins of the world.