

Renewal of the original glory of the Garden of Eden

In Revelation 21:9–22:19 John is filling out the vision which came at the end of the previous section. Revelation 21:9–22:5 expands 21:1–8. In particular 22:1–5 expands 21:4–5a, and develops the idea of a renewal of the original glory of the Garden of Eden.

¹Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ²It was flowing down the middle of the street of the city. On both this side of the river and on that side the tree of life was growing, yielding twelve kinds of fruits, and producing its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³And there shall be no curse any more. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city. His servants will serve him, ⁴and they will see his face. His name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And there will no longer be any night. They will not need any light of any lamp, nor the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

The picture is as follows. God and the Lamb are sitting upon a joint-throne. Together the Father and the Son are ruling over the new Jerusalem. From their throne springs up a river with ‘the water of life, bright as crystal’. It flows down the main highway of the city.

It is a picture of the Garden of Eden restored as a garden-city. In Genesis 2 a river sprang up from the ground^{□1} and divided into four rivers which watered the whole surrounding land^{□2}. In Eden there was one tree of life which gave life so that people could live for ever. In the new Jerusalem there are trees of life on both sides of the river. ‘The tree of life’ is here a collective term. It means an abundance of ‘trees of life’. In the new Jerusalem there are entire forests of ‘trees of life’.

God’s kingdom is like a flowing river of life. What is the value of a river? It brings life. This river has ‘the water of life’. A river brings coolness and shade. It is a place where cities grow up. People congregate by a river (Acts 16:13 is an example). It is a place where things grow. The people of God are to become as a tree planted by the waters. Their leaf will be green. They will never cease yielding fruit^{□1}.

What is this river like? It is bright. It is not dirty water. It is living and fresh, not stagnant.

Where does this river come from? It comes from the throne of God. God in his sovereignty has decreed it. Obedience to his sovereignty brings its blessing.

Where does it flow to? It flows down the high street. Often rivers are in the middle of the city. The Thames flows through the middle of London. The River Seine flows through Paris, and Basel has the River Rhine. This river of God flows down the main street of the capital city of God’s kingdom.

• *River springs up – in Genesis, when it divided into four and again in this vision*

• *Tree of life – one in Genesis – many in the new Jerusalem*

God’s kingdom is like a flowing river of life

• *Brings life*

• *Fresh and clean*

• *From the throne of God*

• *Flows through the main street*

□1 22:6
□2 22:10-14

□1 Jeremiah 17:8

• *Flows out to the nations – when gospel message changes people’s hearts*

• *Christian gospel will grow, be fruitful and heal*

• *No curse – from ancestors or from the law*

• *Curse upon nature*

• *Touches of final redemption now*

We will be in the presence of God and the Lamb

• *No darkness*

• *Purity, clarity and joy experienced*

• *A panoramic vision – from here-and-now into the future*

• *A river of life will go out to the nations*

Where does it reach? It flows out to the nations. If the Christians are to affect the world it will happen not by political agitating, not even simply by praying or ‘binding Satan’, certainly not by trying to have a politicized ‘state church’. Our gospel will influence the nations when the gospel message of salvation changes the hearts of many people, and then that people apply the gospel and ‘work out’ their salvation. Then indeed a river of life will flow to the nations. The Christian gospel and its influence will grow; it will be fruitful; it will heal. John describes many aspects of this powerful and influential ‘river of life’.

There will be no curse there. Nowadays many people are interested in curses inherited from ancestors, but the Bible has more to say about the curse of **God** against planet earth because of human sin. There is no reference here to curses from ancestors. The Bible says that every possible power has been conquered in the Lord Jesus Christ and ‘you have’ – **already** – ‘come to fullness of life in him’. Ancestral influence has to be resisted but there need be no great fuss about it. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. As for the ‘curse of the law’, every Christian is redeemed from it¹. There is a curse upon nature². We are not completely delivered from it yet since we are **waiting** for the final glory. However, when the gospel is preached in power the ‘river of life’ begins to flow and we have touches of our final redemption even now.

Life will be under the happy rule of God. In the new Jerusalem we are in the presence of God and the Lamb. We enjoy fellowship with God. We are fully identified with God. His name is on our foreheads. We live in the light of God. Everything symbolized by darkness is exterminated. Everything symbolized by light (purity, clarity, joy) is experienced. We share God’s rule. It starts even now, but eventually it all comes to perfect climax in a new world. When is this picture to be fulfilled? It is a **panoramic** vision. Like most prophetic visions it starts from the here-and-now and stretches out into the future. The ‘times and the seasons’ are not always so clearly revealed. We start walking in the light of what God plans to do – immediately. As his kingdom proceeds forward, more and more of the vision comes to pass. The new heavens and new earth are the final fulfilment of the visions but as we walk in the light of the gospel we shall have some of it straightaway. A river of life will go out to the nations.

¹ Galatians 3:13
² Genesis 3:17



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