

Completing the Circle

Genesis and *Revelation*, the first and last books of the Bible, complete the circle of God's plan for humanity. *Genesis* opens with, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (1:1) while *Revelation* concludes with "a new creation of new heavens and a new earth" (21:1).

John spends a significant amount of time describing the construction and design of the twelve gates and the inclusion of the twelve apostles and the twelve tribes of Israel. This is the New Jerusalem where Christians, Israel, and Old Testament saints will spend their eternal lives forever before the face of God enjoying the fulfillment of all God's promises. John stresses that the city gates of New Jerusalem will never be shut because it is the city with open gates on a new earth where those saved by Jesus Christ will dwell throughout eternity. There is no night and all evil has been eradicated. John is clear that after the final judgement, there will be no second chances to repent. The Book of Life will contain the names of all those destined for heaven, but for anyone whose name is not written in that book, he or she will be thrown into the lake of fire.

The city itself is described as "a massive, brilliant, crystal-clear diamond full of the glory of God, shining from its center all over the new heavens with eternity bathed in the radiance of its splendor." (Class notes, Fr. Lorenzo Tosco CSJ) John often calls the New Jerusalem 'the Bride of the Lamb' (the Church). The 'wedding day of the Lamb', however, signals the beginning of God's reign (19:7-8).

What is noteworthy in *Revelation*, is that despite several references to the Temple, there is no actual Temple building in the city! John goes on to explain why in Chapter 21: 22-23. "I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is the light, and its lamp is the lamb". Jesus Christ is the Temple and so fulfills the prophecy: "Destroy this Temple and in three days, I will raise it up" . . .he was speaking of the temple of his body" (John 2:19)]

John's description of the New Jerusalem reflects many features of the Garden of Eden: its garden, a river, and the Tree of Life. The Tree of Life in both *Genesis* (3:22) and *Revelation* (22:1-2), stands as a **symbol of God's life-giving presence and the fullness of eternal life available in God.** Adam and Eve were banished from Eden so they could not eat of this tree, but in *Revelation*, the purpose of the Tree of Life is restored. Anyone who eats its medicinal leaves is "cured" and given 'eternal life.'

To the early Christians the message of *Revelation* was lifegiving! It provided hope for their journey, strength in their faith, and assurance that the pain and suffering they endured in Jesus' name would ensure not only ensure their names were written in the Book of Life but also that the promise of *Revelation* would be fulfilled: "They will look upon his face and his name shall be on their foreheads . . .and they shall reign forever and ever." (22: 4-5).

This submission concludes the *Revelation* series. May its message always give YOU hope!