

The River of Life

Natalie sat down on the side of her bed and closed her eyes. Her eight-year-old daughter, Jاليا's, temperature was down. The concern of taking her to urgent care or the emergency room was receding, thankfully. It was a cost that Natalie could ill afford.

Natalie was mentally exhausted from the recent events and circumstances that were present in her life. There was her upended relationship with her husband, who had moved out more than a year ago and was showing no signs of reconciliation. There was her job, which held an enormous workload that according to the last staff meeting was going to increase. Then there was what she felt was the unfair and biased nature of her working conditions that prevented her from thriving.

One of her best friends had been pulling away for years, and constant inquiries from Natalie were met with little or no communication. Recently, Natalie lost one of her closest cousins, when a drunk driver slammed into her car and killed her.

It had been a dark period of her life, and Natalie was hurting. She was grateful, however, for the prayers and support of her pastor's wife, Sister Scott.

"God will get you through this season of hardship," Sister Scott had said. "There are better days ahead. One day, all of our suffering will end. Grab hold of the hope and light that we have in Christ."

- 1.** *Why do we associate the words darkness and night with the problems of life?*
- 2.** *What would you say is the darkest night in your life you have lived through?*
- 3.** *Did that dark night end happily or not? Explain your answer.*

The Water and Tree of Life

Revelation 22:1-3, KJV

1 And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

2 In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and 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:

Revelation 22:1-3, NIV

¹Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.

After showing John the New Jerusalem, the angel now showed him “the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal” (vs. 1). This hearkened back not only to the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:10), but to the beginning of John’s revelation of heaven (Rev. 4:6)—as well as Jesus’ ministry on Earth. These last two were echoed in verse 1, as this river flowed “from the throne of God and of the Lamb.” These waters were not only physically pure but spiritually pure as well.

The vision then extended further—all the way back to the creation of man. As the river continued “down the middle of the great street of the city on each side . . . stood the tree of life”—the same Tree of Life Adam and Eve had been prevented from eating (Gen. 3:22-24). In addition, this tree was no longer in a separate location but planted throughout the city, on both the river’s banks. Its fruit would be readily available for all who desired it.

Furthermore, the Tree(s) of Life would bear “twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month” (vs. 2). There would be no more seasonal harvest, followed by seasons of barrenness; there would always be an abundance of fruit all year round. Furthermore, “the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (vs. 2). Thus, “No longer will there be any curse” (vs. 3). Both physical and spiritual death will have been banished.

Above all these human benefits, “The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him” (vs. 3). No longer will the Father God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit seem elusive to us; we will live in their midst—and we will serve Him together, along with the angels and all His other servants. And because the curse will be removed and we will have been given eternal life that does not diminish, this service will not be difficult and/or drudgery; it will be joyous, worshipful, and God-focused.

4. *What did the angel show John, in verse 1? How did this vision connect to previous sections of the Bible?*

5. *What stood on the banks of the river? What was significant about this?*

6. *What else was in this city, and how would God’s people respond to it?*

The Eternal Light

Revelation 22:4-7, KJV

4 And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.

5 And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever

Revelation 22:4-7, NIV

⁴They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for

and ever.

6 And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.

7 Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.

ever and ever.

⁶The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

⁷"Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll."

Not only will all God's people live with Him in their midst, but as John declared, "They will see his face" (vs. 4). Even one as great as Moses could not see God's face and live (Ex. 33:20); but in the New Jerusalem all sin and death will be vanquished. God's people will once again be able to look upon Him in wonder and live. They will see Him fully, and fully be known as His—so much so, John added, that God's "name will be on their foreheads." It is not entirely clear whether this mark is literal or poetic; what is clear is that God's people will be clearly identified.

Furthermore, night will be a thing of the past: "They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light" (vs. 5). Thus, this light will be both physical and spiritual. And as opposed to the millennium, where the reign of God's people still had a temporal aspect (Rev. 20:4), in the New Jerusalem "they will reign for ever and ever" (vs. 5) with Christ. At this point the description of the New Jerusalem ended, but there still would be some final words for John (and us).

The angel declared to John the veracity of the words he had heard and recorded in Revelation: "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord . . . sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place" (vs. 6)—again, bringing the message full circle as it echoed the opening words of Revelation (1:1).

Note the closed quotes at the end of verse 6. It is generally believed that the speaker changed in verse 7—to Jesus Himself: “Look, I am coming soon!” The exact meaning and date of “soon” is not known, but it is certain that Jesus wanted His people to remain ready for His return (Matt. 24:35—25:11). He affirmed the words of His angel, and added a word of exhortation: “Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.” Those who honored and obeyed God’s words would be honored by God at the time of Jesus’ return.



7. What will God’s people see, according to verse 4? How will it be clear that they are God’s people?

8. What else will God’s people enjoy (vs. 5)?

9. Who spoke in verses 6-7, and what did each declare?

This drawing from what is called the Apocalypse of Andrew of Caesarea, dating to the 10th century A.D., shows the River of Life flowing from the throne of God, Christ on the throne, the apostles around Him, the Tree of Life by the river, and John (lower right corner) viewing the heavenly scene.

Music Is a Light

Larry began to slip down the dark slope of depression after his oldest son died from asthma at the age of 12. Larry stayed in his bedroom and slept most of the time. He had little to no contact with his family, which included his wife Tracy and other son, 7-year-old Teddy. The depression caused him to lose his job of 23 years and jeopardize his marriage of 18 years to the love of his life. It was a dark time for everyone. Thankfully they are a family of believers. When Larry could not pray, Tracy covered him in prayer.

During that period of depression, Larry's routine included waking up to eat breakfast and going back to sleep for most of the day. This sometimes included days of not bathing or having communication with anyone for no longer than 20 minutes. He did not want any sunlight in the rooms he occupied. He did not want to leave the house. His words were few and far between.

Before the bout with depression, Larry was heavily involved with his church's music department. He is a saxophone player and he loved it. Everyone loved to hear Larry. He knew he was anointed and blessed God's people.

One day, Larry's wife came into the room and suggested for Larry to play his saxophone. Surprisingly, he agreed. When he played, 1 Samuel 16:23 came to life: "And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him" (KJV). The depressive spirit on Larry lifted and he was well. Larry wrote a song in memory of his son Linden.

10. *How easy is it to fall into a depression when things go wrong?*

11. *How can knowing about heaven help someone who is in a dark place?*

12. *Finish this sentence "Music is one light out of a dark place because _____."*

Water and Light Are Life

Water represents life. Although colorless and odorless, it is one of the most important substances on the earth. It's symbolic of life because every living thing needs it to survive. The River of Life in heaven is like the everlasting light that is there as well. Both show that life there is the fullest it can be. But the water of life can also flow here and now into the dark places of people's lives when we share Jesus with them.

► *Think of where the world needs the River of Life to flow and how you can contribute. Where are the dry bones that need watering? Is there an issue with homelessness, crime, or lack of youth and elderly programs? Once you identify a need, try to fulfill it in your own special way.*

KEY VERSE

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

—Revelation 22:1, KJV

Then the angels showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

—Revelation 22:1, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of August 22 through August 28

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Luke 14:16-24—Invited to the Heavenly Banquet.
- Tue.** Exodus 19:9-15—Preparing for God to Appear.
- Wed.** Revelation 1:3-8—The Alpha and Omega.
- Thu.** Isaiah 46:8-13—The Ending Declared from the Beginning.
- Fri.** Isaiah 54:1-5—God Is Your Husband.
- Sat.** Lamentations 3:21-31—God's Steadfast Love Never Ceases.
- Sun.** Revelation 22:10-21—Come, Lord Jesus!