

# The Rebellion is Over

After the return of Christ, the redeemed are taken to Heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:17), and the earth lies desolate. Jeremiah saw it in vision: *“The earth was without form and void... and there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled”* (Jeremiah 4:23–25). During this time—the thousand years described in Revelation 20—Satan is bound, not by chains of metal, but by circumstance. His dominion is shattered. He is left alone on a ruined planet with no one to deceive and no souls to tempt. The once-proud deceiver now wanders a silent graveyard, a prisoner of his own failure.

Meanwhile, God’s people reign with Christ in Heaven and take part in the work of judgment (Revelation 20:4; 1 Corinthians 6:2). Every question is answered. God’s justice and mercy are fully revealed.

At the close of the millennium, the wicked are resurrected (Revelation 20:5). Satan seizes the moment. He rallies the nations—*“Gog and Magog”*—in one last futile attempt to conquer the city of God. “They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city” (v. 9). Imagine: every evil general, every deceptive dictator, is alive. They now form an alliance to conquer the New Jerusalem. But the outcome is never in doubt.

Here is the solemn conclusion of the judgment, with God sitting in His great white throne, and everyone who has ever lived alive and present. *“I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.”* (Revelation 20:12) All the unrepentant stand before God. Every hidden thing is made plain. In that moment, ‘every knee shall bow... and every tongue shall confess’ that God is just (Isaiah 45:23, Romans 14:11). Finally a fire from God will devour the wicked (v. 9). Yet even this is not, as some imagine, an eternity of torment. God says through the prophet, *“The soul who sins shall die”* (Ezekiel 18:4). And Paul re-iterates the principle: *“The wages of sin is death.”* (Romans 6:23) Apart from God, there can be no life. God loves us so much He gives us freedom to choose, yet to choose to depart from God is ultimately a choice for death (see Genesis 2:17).

God does not take pleasure in this. *“As I live,”* He says, *“I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live”* (Ezekiel 33:11). Yet those who have persistently rejected His grace must now face the consequence of their choice. The fire consumes them (Malachi 4:1–3), and the result is eternal: sin will never rise again (Nahum 1:9).

This is God’s “strange act” (Isaiah 28:21)—alien to His heart, yet necessary to secure the universe in peace. Sin and those who cling to it, along with Satan and his angels who are responsible for starting the rebellion, are gone. “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire,” (v. 14) marking an end to all destruction. Then, with all trace of sin destroyed, God will gently wipe away every tear (Revelation 21:4) and say, “Behold, I make all things new” (v. 5). The rebellion is over. The universe is at peace, secure, and happy once more. All will gather around the throne and sing “God is love” (1 John 4:8).

# ANCIENT WORLDS *of the* BIBLE

Study Guide 17

by Pastor Daniel McFeeters

## A Trip to the New Jerusalem

Through this study I hope you’ve enjoyed journeying with me to the Holy Land. Before I could embark on my journey, I spent weeks preparing. Perhaps that trip to Israel has lessons for another trip that we are all taking—a journey not to earthly Jerusalem, but to the New Jerusalem.

Before I could leave, I had to secure a passport. Without it, I couldn’t travel out of the country. In the same way, no one enters the gates of Heaven without **faith**—*“Without faith it is impossible to please Him”* (Hebrews 11:6). Even after I received my passport, it wasn’t valid until I signed it. Likewise, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13), and that seal is made visible in our lives by our rest in Christ—both spiritually and in our Sabbath experience (Hebrews 4:9–10).

I had to pack a suitcase, and that meant buying the right clothes for the trip—comfortable and sturdy garments. For Heaven, we need a better garment—“the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10), offered to us by Christ.

I needed a boarding pass to get on the plane. That little piece of paper was one of the most expensive parts of the trip. But our place in God’s Kingdom was purchased at infinite cost. *“You were bought with a price”* (1 Corinthians 6:20)—the price of Calvary.

I also needed a map and itinerary—I wouldn’t have wanted to get lost overseas!. Scripture is our guidebook: *“For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord”* (Jeremiah 29:11). I carried my phone to stay connected with family and record memories. Prayer connects us to God, and a journal can help us remember how He’s led us.

We had a tour guide who explained the landmarks. On our spiritual journey, Jesus walks beside us. He promises, *“I am with you always”* (Matthew 28:20), and leads us through His Word and by the Spirit of Prophecy.

Finally, the journey began. It was exciting—and a little scary. But I didn’t go alone—my pastor friends were with me. Neither do we go alone to the heavenly kingdom. We journey with fellow believers—encouraging one another, holding each other up, and walking together, by faith, toward the City of God.

## Questions for Reflection & Discussion

### A Better Country

Unlike my visit to Israel, when I booked a return ticket, our trip to the New Jerusalem will be a one-way journey. Paul wrote, *“Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 3:20). Jesus Himself said, *“In My Father’s house are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you”* (John 14:2).

When Jesus returns, *“every eye will see Him”* (Revelation 1:7). He will come not in secret, but with “a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The dead in Christ will rise, and the living righteous will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. After spending a thousand years living and reigning with Christ in heaven (Revelation 20:6), God will bring the New Jerusalem down to this earth, which will be made new again and will become the eternal dwelling place of God’s throne. On that day, Jesus’ feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, and the mountain will become a vast plain (Zechariah 14:4), prepared for the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem.

The apostle John, in vision, saw *“the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”* (Revelation 21:2). The city shines with the glory of God—its walls made of jasper, its streets of pure gold, its gates of pearl (Revelation 21:18–21). At its center stands the throne of God and the Lamb. A river of life flows from the throne, and on either side grows the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit and healing the nations (Revelation 22:1–2).

The promise of the New Jerusalem throughout the Scripture. The prophet Isaiah foresaw a world transformed: *“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat... and a little child shall lead them”* (Isaiah 11:6). In God’s restored kingdom, even nature is healed. *“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,”* the Lord declares, *“for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea”* (Isaiah 11:9). *“They shall build houses and inhabit them... plant vineyards and eat their fruit”* (Isaiah 65:21).

But the greatest promise isn’t just the peace—it’s presence. *“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them”* (Revelation 21:3). There will be no more death, or sorrow, or crying. *“The former things have passed away”* (v. 4).

We are called to live now as citizens of that world, though we have not yet seen it. Like Abraham, we *“wait for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God”* (Hebrews 11:10). That city is real. That promise is sure. And one day, very soon, we will walk its streets—not as tourists, but as children come home.

#### SCRIPTURE:

*For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. – Hebrews 13:14*

**REFLECTION:** As you think about the metaphor of preparing for a physical journey, which part is the most relevant to your current spiritual experience—securing your passport (faith), packing your clothes (righteousness), studying the itinerary (God’s Word), or walking with fellow travelers (church fellowship)? Why?

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**EXPERIENCE:** Have you ever felt like a stranger or pilgrim in this world? How does the promise of the New Jerusalem encourage you in times of hardship or uncertainty?

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**QUESTION:** Why do you think God allows the final judgment and the resurrection of the wicked at the end of the millennium, instead of ending sin immediately after Christ’s return? What does this reveal about God’s justice and mercy?

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**QUESTION:** How does the Bible’s teaching that the wicked are destroyed—rather than tormented forever—change your understanding of God’s character? (see Ezekiel 18:4, Romans 6:23, and Malachi 4:1–3)

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**QUESTION:** Why do you think the idea of eternal torment became so widespread in Christian tradition, despite Scripture’s clear statements about the final destruction of sin and sinners?

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**RESPONSE:** In light of what you’ve studied, what practical step will you take this week to live more intentionally as a citizen of Heaven?

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Written by Pastor Daniel McFeeters with assistance from  
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