

**Eat This Tree**  
**Revelation 22**  
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**Gathered at the River**

In the final chapter of the final word God has given to man, a picture of heaven emerges that has caught the full attention of believers through the ages. This attention has spawned numerous songs which have been used in church worship services down through the ages. These songs have provided a continual source of encouragement for the hearts of men as well as expression of worship. If one has followed a close study of the first 21 chapters, it is easy to lose sight of the impending persecution upon the original recipients of the book. The picture is one foreign to the thinking of modern man.

**No Conflict, Competition or Pollution**

The first description given in chapter 22 is one of a river of life which is crystal clear. The purity testifies of the absence of corruption and pollution. Part of the pollution we know on this earth is a consequence of the fall. Heaven is to be a place with no consequences of the fall. This gorgeous river comes from the throne of God and the lamb referring to Jesus and God the Father. The language that places it in the middle of the street is a bit difficult to discern. Regardless of what this describes, the tree of life is on either side of the river. This is not clear to me whether it is multiple trees or one that spans over the river with a connection forming some sort of arc. The significance is the abundance on both sides of the river. The river is not divisive but flows with ample supply for all as does the fruit born on the tree of life with a different kind of fruit for every month of the year. The twelve symbolizes completeness and abundance.

The statement made in verse 2, “the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” is difficult at best. My personal take on this verse is that this tree of life symbolizes the absence of competition and conflict among all races. The olive branch sometimes carries the symbolic meaning of peace in our world yet in eternity it will be the leaves on the tree of life that sooth the aches and pains of thousands of years of war among the peoples of the world. This is such an unusual way of thinking. No competition, no conflict, no struggle.

Part of this lack of competition is echoed in the idea that every person in this new kingdom will have the name of Christ on their forehead. This is the name which will no doubt be worn proudly. But there will be no contrast of other names. The signal of no struggle from the enemy to seek to overpower the citizens is refreshing. No more cautiousness concerning a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. The lack of contrast continues in the description of no day and night. God’s illumination will show the beauty of everything without the need of light/dark contrast. There is also no contrast between beginning and end because there is no end.

## Unbelievable News

John is given reassurance in verse 6 that these visions he is seeing and the words he is hearing really are true. These words are backed up by the Lord God, the spirits of the prophets, and His angel. This verse seems as an agreement by John with the reader who might naturally be raising the question, “Can this really be true?” Many have believed that God has tarried beyond his promise, as he says here, he will come quickly. We need not see this announcement as saying Jesus would be coming before any human description of a short time. The phrase can be explained in two ways without doubting God’s word. First we are told that a day with Christ is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day. God’s time table and ours are not the same. Second, the structure of the phrase *quickly* could simply mean that when the events begin to take place, they will quickly come to pass. Either interpretation is true to the text.

With all of its symbolism and mystery, one might wonder why an attempt should be made to understand the writing. Verse 7 provides a very clear answer, “Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.” To read and ponder on the truths of Revelation hold the promise of God of a special blessing.

John again seems to be caught up in what he is seeing and hearing as he falls down to worship at the feet of the angel. The angel again corrects John’s worship and directs him toward the Lord. The application is clear, do not worship the messenger, worship God. Do not be enamored with fascinating events, be enamored with the one who created it all and will bring it all to a proper ending and new beginning.

## Closing Thoughts

The remaining 12 verses seem to be random thoughts John needed to express from his experience but are difficult to connect in literary form. He is told not to seal the book. Often writers of prophecy or apocalyptic literature would complete the work and place a seal on the outside with a future date for the work to be read. The urgency of the message is emphasized with the command to immediately circulate the book.

Verse 11 appears to be a statement of reality. As times come and go there will be righteous and there will be unrighteous. There will be a continual stream of wrong doers and those John calls filthy. But do not be dismayed. Jesus is coming and he will render judgment. In his hands is a reward for every man. The Christians in this era had no recourse for their ill treatment. The court was not kind to them and for them to take justice into their own hands would have cost them dearly. Any vengeance to be given out to their persecutors must come from the throne of God and Jesus assures them his judgment is coming. The assurance continues into verses 14 and 15. Those who have been washed in the blood of the lamb will be blessed. The rebellious, who refuse Christ, will be outside the kingdom and unable to access the blissful place with the tree of life.

As the book comes to a close, assurance is once again given that this message comes from none other than the Christ. Jesus is named as the sender of the angel suggesting the angel as a messenger of a message whose source is the throne room of God. The message continues with

an open invitation in verse 17. The call is clear and ongoing, come while there is still time. Come and enjoy the water of life without cost.

John also includes the kind of warning about tampering with the words of the book as would be common. The emphasis here is not just preserving the written word as it is written, but living according to the teaching of the book. To know the truth and to ignore or rebel against it serves to multiply the agony of the consequence of denying Christ.

The Bible's initial chapters speak of a Garden. The Bible's ending chapters are a picture of a Garden as well. The garden of Genesis became contaminated. The garden of Revelation is forever pure. The final words are an assurance; Jesus is coming, it is in his time and by his standards it will be quickly.