

*THE NEXT
WORSHIP*

BIBLE  *STUDY*

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5 STUDIES FOR INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS



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SESSION ONE

HEAVEN ON EARTH

REVELATION 7:9-17; 21:1-5

MURALS TELL THE STORY OF A COMMUNITY. Murals communicate the identity of the people. The images in Scripture do the same thing. They speak to the identity and the narrative of the people of God. Like murals, we are an image to people who will never read Scripture. The church is a mural that tells a story.

Multicultural worship is not entertainment. It is an act of solidarity with communities we may never meet. It is connecting our story to their story, through which the Holy Spirit brings communion. We have the opportunity to help people to see the nature of God and God's kingdom as we worship in unity but not uniformity. What does this foretaste of heaven look like?

SESSION GOAL

Gain a vision for our ultimate destination as the multiethnic, multilingual, multinational family of God.

READ

Introduction and chapter one of
The Next Worship

 **REFLECT** 

- * How do cultural differences and preferences affect the way God's people worship together? Or the reasons they don't?

- * If worship is about a collective expression, how does that reorient your understanding of the nature and purpose of a worshipping community?

 **STUDY** 

READ REVELATION 7:9-17; 21:1-5.

Consider the imagery in these passages and what it provided for the hearers. Given the persecution God's people were experiencing, the symbols were meaningful for a community that needed to hold on to hope. These images were used to encourage people who were living under an oppressive empire.

⁹After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.¹⁰And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God,

who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”

¹¹All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,
¹²saying:

“Amen!
Praise and glory
and wisdom and thanks and honor
and power and strength
be to our God for ever and ever.
Amen!”

¹³Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”

¹⁴I answered, “Sir, you know.”

And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵Therefore,

“they are before the throne of God
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne
will shelter them with his presence.

¹⁶Never again will they hunger;
never again will they thirst.

The sun will not beat down on them,
nor any scorching heat.

¹⁷For the Lamb at the center of the throne
will be their shepherd;

‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’

‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”

3. What does God promise to the people in these passages?

4. What does God say about God's nature in 21:3-5?

Revelation 7:16-17 references the restoration of Israel portrayed in Isaiah 49:10. The promise in Isaiah 25:8 is also quoted in both Revelation 7 and 21. This reminds the people of the promises the former prophets had already spoken.

5. Are God's promises for an individual or for a community?
What impact does this have on our reading of this passage?

6. Why is the repetition of previous promises in their history so important to God's people?

7. When communities have experienced collective and generational trauma, what can communal worship offer them? What can their theology and practice of worship offer to people who haven't had those traumatic experiences?

8. What does the promise that everything will be made new mean to people who have experienced marginalization and persecution at the hands of occupation and empire?

 **RESPOND** 

- * How can we move from differences and diversity as something to be ignored to fully embodying our diversity in our practice of worship? How can these worship moments lead to healing and restoration?

- ✦ What are you doing to embrace God’s intended diversity, and what ideas do you have for how we should live into the future reality of the kingdom now?

- ✦ If at the end of all things God’s people worship God together across cultures, and today cultural differences inevitably lead to tension, how might we develop individual and communal worship practices to turn our hearts away from our own preferences and comfort toward the needs of others?

At the end of all things, our worship embodies God’s creativity. God intended diversity. We have an ultimate destination as the multiethnic, multilingual, multinational family of God. This is a picture not just of diversity but of liberation, healing, restoration, and flourishing. Worship here on earth is to reflect, point to, and practice that ultimate worship experience.

☀ PRAY ☀

Pray for our collective ability to see the nature of who God is and what God is about when we stand with one another in worship and solidarity. Pray that God will make the church a foretaste of heaven, and that people will be compelled to Christ

because they see heaven on earth. Thank God that at the end of all things, God will reconcile and renew all things.

☀️ **NEXT STEPS** ☀️

This week, don't wait passively. Participate in the ministry of reconciliation as a form of living into God's promises and seeking healing and restoration. Make decisions about your lifestyle that point to the coming kingdom. Ask how your life might be a reflection of the power of the kingdom. Examine and name the obstacles to diverse worship, and consider creative ways to compel your community in this direction.

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