

Series: Behold! The City

Lesson I: The City of God

Lesson Objectives:

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to...

- Identify some of their existing attitudes and ideas about the future
- Contrast individualistic impressions of heaven with corporate impressions of heaven
- Identify the City of God as a biblical metaphor
- Compare our relationship to God, each other, and nature, before the fall, after the fall, and after the final restoration

Materials Needed:

- ☐ Scrap paper, cut in strips
- ☐ Pens
- ☐ Table (see Lead In)
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Copies of handout “Behold! The City: One”
- ☐ Board and markers or overhead (see Task Three)

Lead In:

Gather around a table. If you have a very large group, you will need to divide into two groups or do this Lead In on the floor. Give every student two or three strips of scrap paper and a pen, or have these in a pile for them to take. Tell them that you are going to give them instructions for what to write on the papers and that they are going to have only 30 seconds to write what you tell them. They should only write one answer on each strip and not include their name. They can write as many strips as there is time for. Read the following instruction and then begin the clock. At the end of 30 seconds, instruct them to put their pens down and to put any answers they got in a pile in the centre. The instruction is this:

- Write down any idea you have or have heard about heaven or the afterlife.

Spread the answers out and have the students take out any that are duplicates. Have the students skim over the answers and see if there are any they want to add so that you can have a pretty complete list of people's opinions of heaven and the afterlife.

Say something like, *We have a lot of ideas about what will happen to us when we die. I used to think I would have a stove and a Christmas tree on a thick, fluffy, floating cloud and that I would live there all by myself. I don't know where this idea came from or why I wanted to have those two items, but that's how I pictured my life after death. In this series we are going to explore these themes to see if we can come up with a fuller picture of eternal life.*

Task One:

Ask for a volunteer to read Revelation 21:2-4 out loud. Ask the other students to listen and identify what metaphor or image is being used for life after death. Have the volunteer read and then solicit answers. The metaphor being used here is a city (other

imagery is also used and will come out more in Task Three). Ask students, *Has anyone heard the saying “hell is other people” (Jean-Paul Sartre)? How does this Bible passage that we just heard relate to that?* Solicit answers. Sartre said that hell was other people but Revelation says that heaven is a city, and cities are *full* of other people. If Sartre thought that hell was other people, the Bible seems to say that *heaven* is other people! Ask for some comments on that. Does it surprise them? You are going to explore this further.

Task Two:

Go back to the pile of strips from the Lead In. Instruct students to sort these strips into two piles. In one pile, they should put all the strips that describe heaven or the afterlife as a solitary, individual experience (such as my example of the cloud lair). In the other pile, they should put any strips that describe heaven or the afterlife as a relational experience. Allow the students to debate the placement with each other. When they are sorted, ask students to have one final look to make sure they agree with the placements before asking, *Which pile is bigger? Do you think that we usually think of life after death as an individual experience or a corporate one? Why do you think that is?*

Task Three:

Say something like, *At the very beginning of this curriculum year, we began by looking at our creation in the Garden of Eden. We focused on our creation as relational beings, in relationship to God, each other, and nature. We later learned that when sin entered the world, all of these relationships went off course. That is why there is so much pain and sadness in the world. But in the end, God intends to restore these relationships. I am going to give you a handout that will make that a little more clear. It is a chart and you are going to work together, in twos or threes, to fill in the chart.*

Have students gather in pairs or groups of three. Give students a copy of the handout “Behold! The City: One”, a pen, a Bible, and ample time to complete the chart. Be available to assist and clarify. For example, if you have students who are less familiar with the Bible, they may need help identifying where the passages are from and how they fit together.

When they are finished, do feedback as a whole class. You can do this on a board or out loud but a great way to do it would be to use an overhead. Make an overhead copy of the handout and put it up for all to see. Give overhead pens to the students and have them come up to the overhead, all at once, and fill in certain boxes. Then have them sit down and review the answers they see. What would they add or take away? Whatever way you conduct feedback, make sure it happens. Clarify and correct as needed, guiding the conversation towards the points that seem important to emphasize with your group. A completed chart is available on the following page. Of course, this is just a set of sample answers. You and your students may have differing answers.

Closing:

Say something like, *Have a look at this middle section, when Adam and Eve got kicked out of the Garden of Eden. This is a pretty bad section. There are a lot of negative things that happen in it. But there is also one surprising thing that happens in the passage. Does anyone know what it is?* Have a look at v. 21. Even though the people disobeyed God and God punished the people, God still provided for them in a very personal and loving way. He sewed them clothes made from the skins of his own creatures! All along the way, from creation to the curse to what is to come in the future, God provided for us, for people. God never gives up on people.

Bring the lesson to a close, praying that God’s faithfulness would be known by your people and those around you.

	The Garden (life as it was meant to be) GEN 2:4b-25	The Wilderness (life as it is) GEN 3	The City (life as it will be) REV 21:1-7
What is our relationship to God?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God breathed life into people • God planted a garden for people; he provided for them • God provided all the people's needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People hid from God • People were afraid of God • God cursed people • God continued to provide for people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God and people will be like a groom and bride • God will live with the people again • The people will belong to God • God will comfort people and take away their pain • God will provide for people's needs • People will be God's children
What is our relationship to each other?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We were not alone; God made us for each other • The husband and wife clung to each other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People were ashamed to be naked • People blamed one another • Women would have pain in labour • There was strife between husband and wife 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All things will be new • People will live together in the City of God
What is our relationship to nature?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pleasant things grew in the world and they were good • Adam tilled and kept the garden • People were in relationship with the animals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There would be strife between people and animals • It would take sweat and labour to work the ground for food • There would be death in the world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There will be a new heaven and a new earth, with no sea • All things will be new

Read each passage and decide what that passage says about our relationship to God, to each other, and to the earth. A few examples are done for you to get you started. There may be several answers in each box.