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New Testament
Bible Survey

Revelation

A Wonderful Book to Bend to Your Will

Behold the Beast

- CUTE PURPLE DINOSAUR
- CVTE PVRPLE DINOSAVR
- CV V L DI V
- C = 100 | V = 5 | L = 50 | D = 500 | I = 1
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- **666**



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A Wonderful Book to Bend to Your Will

"…neither apostolic nor prophetic…I can in no way detect that the Holy Spirit produced it…Again, they are supposed to be blessed who keep what is written in this book; and yet no one knows what that is, to say nothing of keeping it…Christ is neither taught nor known in it." - Martin Luther

"Few writings in all of literature have been so obsessively read with such generally disastrous results…" – Luke Timothy Johnson

"…no other part of the Bible has provided such a happy hunting ground for all sorts of bizarre and dangerous interpretations." – Gene Boring



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The Cave of the Apocalypse on Patmos



The book of Revelation was written by John while he was exiled on Patmos.

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Summary of Revelation

- Key Verse: Revelation 5:11 - 13

  “Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying:

  ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!’

  Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

  ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!’”



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Summary of Revelation

- Summary:

  Revelation is a prophetic experience and message written for seven churches in Asia Minor to encourage them to reject the Roman idolatry of emperor worship and other practices that present themselves as substitutes for the true worship of God. The letter uses the Jewish literary language of apocalyptic to demonstrate the current (and continuing!) overthrow of Satan's worldly power structure through the completed sacrificial death of Jesus. Jesus tells the believers himself that he is faithful and, if they continue to resist giving their loyalty to Rome (up to and including death, like Antipas - 2:13), the believers will take part in the wedding feast of the Lamb.

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The Book of Revelation

- Genre: *Apocalyptic literature*

"A genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another supernatural world."

John J. Collins, ***The Apocalyptic Imagination***, pg. 5

Effect: Multi-layered narrative focused on salvation using heavily symbolic writing



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The Book of Revelation

- Genre: *Prophecy – "forthtelling" not "foretelling"*

"Usually in the early churches prophets delivered oracles which were given to them by God in the worship meeting. They declared the revelation as they received it…But early Christian prophets seem also to have received visionary revelations which they conveyed to the church later in the form of a report of the vision."

Richard Bauckham, ***The Theology of the Book of Revelation***, pg. 3

Effect: Goal of directing listeners to follow/obey Jesus



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The Book of Revelation

- Genre: *Letter*

- Introductory address
- First 3 chapter are addressed to specific recipient churches
- Ends with a post-vision address and instructions to the recipients



Highly developed piece of literature intended to stand in for John's in-person prophesy in the churches themselves.

Effect: Gives an historical setting and unitary whole to the letter

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How Do I Interpret This?

- *You are not alone – the early church struggled with this book as well*

  - *Eastern Church – discarded it*
  - *Used by a lot of heretics*
  - *Not included in Eastern canon until 11th c. CE!*

  - *Western Church – supported it all throughout*
  - *Cited as Scripture in 3rd c.*
  - *Used by Western theologians like Irenaeus*
  - *Included in the canon list of Athanasius (267 CE)*



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How Do I Interpret This?

- *Decisions, decisions, decisions…*
- *Revelation is not meant to be a secret code for us to interpret the times (as tempting as it may be), but to point us to God's faithfulness and sovereignty.*
- *The imagery and themes of Revelation pull from the Old Testament, with the final image of the new heaven and new earth mirroring the creation narrative of Genesis.*
- *Another example of how the New Testament ties itself to the Old Testament!*



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How Do I Interpret This?

Question 1: Is the language and figures to be taken "literally" or "figuratively/symbolically"?

Dispensational approach – literal, like the rest of the Bible

Hal Lindsey in *Late, Great Planet Earth* – locusts of Rev. 9:3 are helicopters

Hilton Sutton in *The Book of Revelation Revealed* – the army of Rev. 16:2 is Chinese (who else could field a 200M army?)

John Walvoord (Dallas Seminary) in *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis* (1990 version) – the last 7 bowls in Rev. 16 could also be consequences of a nuclear war "that God allows"

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How Do I Interpret This?

Question 1: Is the language and figures to be taken "literally" or "figuratively/symbolically"?

"Apocalyptic language uses complex and highly coloured metaphors in order to describe one event in terms of another, thus bringing out the perceived 'meaning' of the first….I have often pointed out to students that to describe the fall of the Berlin Wall, as one well might, as an 'earth-shattering event' might perhaps lead some future historian, writing in the ***Martian Journal of Early European Studies****, to hypothesize that an earthquake had caused the collapse of the Wall, leading to both sides realizing they could live together after all."*

NT Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, pg. 282.

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How Do I Interpret This?

Question 2: Are the prophecies "foretelling"?

If so, are they referring to:

- *Events in the author's time known to the audience (the past)*
- *Tied to Western history and our time (the present)*
- *Future events (the future)*
- *An endless cycle of good vs. evil (timeless)*

So we call these views:

- *Preterist (the past)*
- *Historicist (the present)*
- *Futurist (the future)*
- *Idealist (endless)*



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How Do I Interpret This?

Question 3: How to understand the 1,000 year reign in Ch 20, the "millennium"?

Amillennial – Current time between 1st and 2nd Coming of Christ

Premillennial – Literal 1,000 yr reign AFTER the 2nd Coming

Postmillennial – the inaugurating of the Kingdom just before the 2nd Coming of Christ – very optimistic viewpoint



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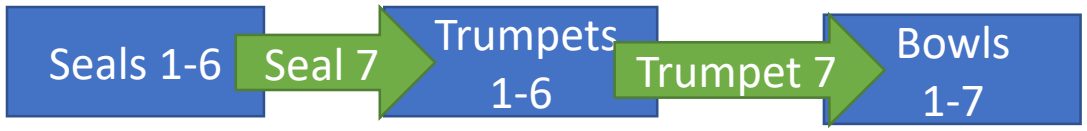
How Do I Interpret This?

Question 4: How should we sequence the judgments?

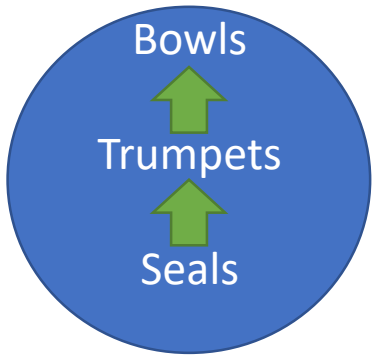
- Linear (chronological)



- Telescopic (overlap)



- Recapitulation (build to climax)



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Overview

Literary breakdowns of Revelation are “complex.”

Letter Opening: 1:1 – 8 *(Literary Hinge: Allusion to Dan. 2:28-29, 45 – “that which must take place”)*

Imperfect Church in World: 1:9 – 3:22 *(Hinge: Allusion to Dan. 2)*

Overarching Vision of God and Lamb of God: 4:1 – 5:14 *(Hinge: Allusion to Dan. 2)*

7 Seals: 6:1 – 8:5 *(Interlude: 7:1 – 17 – 144,000/Multitude)*

7 Trumpets: 8:6 – 11:19 *(Interlude 10:1 – 11:15 – Scroll/Witnesses)*

Conflict Between God/Church and Satan: 12:1 – 14:20
“This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.”

7 Bowls: 15:1 – 16:21 *(NO Interlude – further description of 7th bowl follows)*

Final Judgment: 17:1 – 21:8 *(Exact opposite of intro in Ch. 12 – 14)*
17:1–19:21:Babylon, beast, false prophet 20:1–10:Satan 20:11–15:The Dead 21:1–8:Unbelievers

Perfect Church in Glory: 21:9 – 22:5

Daniel’s Structure of 5 Visions

Intensification / Recapitulation of Woes

6:10 - “How long, Sovereign Lord, until you judge?”

8:13 - “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth”

16:10 – “Its kingdom was plunged into darkness”

16:17 – Theophany – “It is done!”

Letter Closing: 22:6 – 21 *(Literary Hinge: Allusion to Dan. 2)*

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Introduction

The introduction reveals the purpose of the letter:

- Christ is the center of the revelation of the book (1:1)
  - Description of Jesus: “faithful witness,” “firstborn,” “ruler of the kings of earth,” “loves us,” “freed us…by his blood,” “made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve”
- The vision is “symbolized” (*samaino* in Grk – 1:1)
- It is to be obeyed (1:3) – not *foretelling*, but *forthtelling*
- Imminent (1:3) – confronting realities faced by those who receive the letter
- Specific audience – the 7 churches of Asia Minor



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Vision: The Son of Man

The first vision of the book is a "decoder key" for the rest: Jesus is really God! So you can trust him in the midst of your struggles on earth

- Community (1:9) – this is about the churches (Son of Man standing in the midst of the lampstands in 1:13)
- Focus is on Christ's work (1:9) – suffering, kingdom, endurance are "in Jesus"
- At issue is the message of Christ (1:9) – suffering is related to the gospel, cf. also picture of Jesus's mouth with "double-edged sword" (1:16)
- Prophetic commission (1:10) – the loud voice, trumpets, and writing of the visions link the judgments to the OT prophets who spoke against Israel (Isa. 30:8, Jer. 37:2)
- Kingship of priests (1:13) – Christ's kingdom is different and superior to those of the Caesars as symbolized in the description of the Son of Man



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The 7 Churches

The next section of the book of revelation deals with oracles to the churches. John is instructed to write to seven churches in order to encourage and rebuke.

He repeats the words “to the one who conquers…” to set up the bottom-line question he presents to the reader:

Who will remain faithful to Christ and emerge with him in victory in the last days?

Will the churches receiving this vision/oracle stay true or fall to the wayside by giving their loyalty elsewhere?

(hint: they did stay faithful which is why we have Revelation)

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Vision: The Throne of God and the Lamb

Chapters 4 and 5 are central to the meaning of the entire book.

- Chapter 4 presents the throne room of God and demonstrates God is in control.
- It presents multiple theophanies from the OT to demonstrate the true worship of God, often using the same ideas found in 1st c. emperor worship.

- Chapter 5 shocks the reader – it pronounces the arrival of the Lion of Judah, but instead presents the slain Lamb of God.
- This redefines true power for the 1st century church (and us) – it is sacrificial
- God does not overcome the world using military, religious, or financial power – it happens through the suffering and death of Jesus.

This message is key to understanding Revelation – the book is not about violence or power; it is about demonstrating God's glory through suffering.



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Central Vision of Salvation

The middle section of Revelation focuses on three themes: judgment, persecution, and salvation. It follows Daniel's structure of 5 visions, intensifying the judgment as it builds towards the end of the book.

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Daniel's Structure of 5 Visions

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3 Judgments

The 3 judgments in Revelation follow a common structure:

- 4 catastrophes
- 2 intensifications of the woes
- Interlude
- Final Judgment

Rather than attempting to force these to correspond to events in any time (future or past), a better approach is to understand them symbolically based on the 1st century original audience.

#1 axiom of interpretation: it can't mean today what it didn't mean to the original audience

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7 Seals: 6:1 – 8:5

The seals draw from Zechariah 6's use of colored horses who punish those nations that oppress God's people. The horses are calamities created by God to torment unbelievers and vindicate his covenant people. This view from the throne is followed by a picture of the saints and others suffering on earth under the effects of horsemen.

Four Catastrophes	
1st	(6:1) White Horse – conquest (Zech. 6:1ff)
2nd	(6:3) Red Horse – bloodshed (Zech. 6:1ff)
3rd	(6:5) Black Horse – famine/economic stress (Zech. 6:1ff)
4th	(6:7) Pale Horse – death (Zech. 6:1ff)
Intensification of Woes	
5th	(6:9) Witnesses – "How long?" (1 Enoch 9:3-10; Ps. 79:10)
6th	(6:12) Earthquake, sun → black, moon → red, stars fall, heavens recede, mountains & islands removed, fear (Joel 2:10; Isa. 34:4)
Interlude	(7:1) 144,000 sealed, multitude worship (Ezekiel 9)
Final Judgment	
7th	(8:1) Silence (OT symbol of judgment), prayers to heaven (Hab. 2:20; Zech. 2:13)

The interlude gives hope to believers to keep their faith despite suffering because of being sealed by God, explaining further Ch. 6 with the symbol of salvation from Ezekiel 9.

Silence in the OT represents judgment, as the world watches when God acts to punish Israel or the unrighteous.

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7 Trumpets: 8:6 – 11:19

Trumpets	
Four Catastrophes	
1st	(8:7) Hail, fire, blood on 1/3 of earth, trees, grass (Ex. 9:22ff; Ez. 5:2)
2nd	(8:8) Mountain ablaze – 1/3 sea, 1/3 sea creatures, 1/3 ships (Ex. 7:20ff; Jer. 51:25, Isa. 41:15)
3rd	(8:10) Star falls, 1/3 of rivers/springs (Ex. 7:20ff, 1 Enoch 18:13; Ps. 78:44; Isa. 14:12ff; Jer. 8:13)
4th	(8:12) 1/3 of sun, moon, stars, day, darkness (Ex. 10:21ff; Wisdom of Solomon 17:2ff; Jer. 31:35)
Intensification of Woes	
5th	(8:13) "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants", star falls, locusts "torment" (Ex. 10:12; Isa. 14:12, 29; Joel 1-2)
6th	(9:13) 2 x 10k x 10k troops released from Euphrates, 1/3 of humanity killed (Ex. 9:25; Dan. 7:10; Isa. 5:26ff; Jer. 46; 1 Enoch 56:5ff; Job 40-41)

The trumpets section is patterned after the Exodus plagues, laying out the message of God's supremacy (cf. Ex. 19). Like Joshua 6, trumpets announce impending judgment, concluding with a final trumpet on the day of destruction. The trumpets restate and heighten the literary impact of the seals. The first 4 trumpets focus on the suffering of unbelievers and their impending judgment, concluding with the overturning of the natural created order, and the following 2 trumpets tell of an intensification of their suffering.



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7 Trumpets: 8:6 – 11:19

Trumpets	
Intensification of Woes	
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Interlude	(10:1) Scroll eaten, 2 witnesses – theme of prophecy to the world (Ez. 2:8ff; Ps. 19:7ff; Ez. 40-48; Joel 2:28)
Final Judgment	
7th	(11:15) Final judgment announced, lightning, thunder, earthquake, hailstorm (cf. Ex. 9:13; Dan. 7:13)

The interlude in 10-11, like that of the seals, is an interpretive section that describes the place of believers within the described judgment. It recommissions John as a prophet and describes the task of the church during the period between Christ’s ascension and return – to witness to Christ’s salvation in word and deed.

The final trumpet announces the consummation of God’s judgment (10:6-7), restating the final seal, using the common OT and apocalyptic symbols of lightning and other natural disasters.

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Conflict Between God & Satan: 12:1 – 14:20

12:1 - 17	The Woman and the Dragon
13:1 - 10	The Beast from the Sea
13:11 - 18	The Beast from the Land
14:1 - 5	The Lamb and the 144,000
14:6 – 13	The Three Angels
14:14 - 20	The Winepress of Judgment
15:2 - 4	The Victory Song – Link to Next Section

The central passage of Revelation can be split into 7 sections based on the vision formula ("I saw" or "Behold"). It further develops the themes of spiritual conflict and judgment of evil from the previous sections. By revealing the source of evil is Satan, the persecuted church can know God is still in control. This is explicitly a call to continue in faith despite their current suffering as in 13:10 – "This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness of the part of God's people."

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7 Bowls: 15:1 – 16:21

Bowls	
Four Catastrophes	
1st	(16:2) Sores (Ex. 9:8; *Life of Moses* 1.127)
2nd	(16:3) Sea of Blood, all sea creatures die (Ex. 7:14)
3rd	(16:4) Rivers/springs of blood, blood to drink (Ex. 7:14; Ps. 78:44)
4th	(16:8) Sun scorches with fire (cf. Ex. 9:23, 10:22; Isa. 49:10; Deut. 32:24)
Intensification of Woes	
5th	(16:10) Darkness, agony, refusal to repent (Ex. 10:21; *Wisdom of Sol.* 17:12; Isa. 8:21ff; Jer. 13:16)
6th	(16:12) Frogs / impure spirits (Ex. 8:1), kings gather for Armageddon, Euphrates dries up (Ex. 14:21; Isa. 11:15; Jer. 50:38; Zech. 10:11)
Interlude	*NO INTERLUDE – MOVES TO FINAL JUDGMENT*
Final Judgment	
7th	(16:17) "Into the air" (Ex. 9:22ff), theophany – "It is done", lightning, earthquake, great city splits, cities collapse, islands fled away, hail (Hag. 2:6)

The bowls are the third set of signs and go back and explain in further detail the judgments described in the seals and trumpets. They do not occur chronologically after the other signs because the end had previously been described (cf. 6:12ff; 11:15ff). The Exodus plagues are typologically referenced here as before since the bowls follow the same order as the trumpets.



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Bowls	
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Interlude	*NO INTERLUDE – MOVES TO FINAL JUDGMENT*
Final Judgment	
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The bowls discourse does not include an Interlude but instead moves directly to the final bowl of judgment. The appearance of God, a "theophany" is explicit, as is the description of judgment, using many of the normal apocalyptic elements found elsewhere in the OT.

This judgment is further described in the next section of Revelation, 17:1 – 21:8.

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Final Judgment of Evil: 17:1 – 21:8

The last of the visions in Daniel's 5-part structure focuses on the final judgment of all evil: the Beast, Babylon, Satan, the False Prophet, the Dead, and Unbelievers. It is a devastating picture of a civilization being judged due to its economic, spiritual, and political corruption.



The figures are explicit parody of Rome versus the Trinity, the whore representing the Roman patron goddess, Roma, as a courtesan.

Ch. 18 explicitly describes the basis of Rome's power, its subjugation of people and insatiable need for luxury items. Babylon is condemned for its substitution of these false idols over God. Believers are warned to reject putting faith in these.

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Final Judgment of Evil: 17:1 – 21:8

The theme of God's justice continues in Ch. 19 as the fall of Babylon is celebrated. The forces of evil continue to be judged as Christ now defeats the beast and the nations used to destroy Babylon itself in 19:11-21.

The weapon used to defeat evil is not physical, spiritual, or political violence (like Rome) but rather testimony about the gospel, lived faithfully by the saints, as symbolized by the sword coming from the mouth of Christ (cf. Isa. 49:2).

John sees this judgment occur in 19:20-21.



Final Judgment of Evil: 17:1 – 21:8

Chapter 20 is hotly debated. There are three views of understanding Revelation 20:1-6:

Premillenialism says: The Kingdom is COMING but things are getting WORSE! Jesus come back!
Postmillenialism says: The Kingdom is HERE and things are getting BETTER! Jesus come back!
Amillenialism says: The Kingdom is a METAPHOR! Jesus is HERE!

It is important to remember the genre of Revelation to understand this passage.

Ch. 20 continues the literary process of recapitulation seen throughout the book, meaning that Ch. 20 is not to be understood as a chronological sequence after 19.

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Final Judgment of Evil: 17:1 – 21:8

Instead, Ch. 20 restates the final victory of God over evil, similar to the seals, trumpets, and bowls:

- 20:1 – 6: The victory of Jesus over Satan and the reign of the saints during the Church Age.
- 20:7 – 10: The judgment of Satan himself and the nations gathered against the saints (note reference to Eze. 38-39 which describes final judgment)
- 20:11 – 15: Final judgment of the dead
- 21:1 – 8: The restoration of the created order with final statement of judgment demonstrating God's justice



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Perfected Church and Creation

The book of Revelation is a thematic resolution to what began in Genesis 1-3. It is the final fulfillment of the Genesis 3:15 promise to destroy evil.

The Bible begins with a picture of two trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, both in the garden of eden (Gen 2). These trees represent for the first man and woman a choice of reliance on God (life) or reliance on self. The fall represents humanity's choice to leave God in pursuit of what is "pleasing in their own EYES."

Once humanity falls to sin, the way to the tree of life is barred. Rather than leaving humanity to simply perish, God promises a way back to the tree of life, and a judgment of evil in the protoevangelion (Gen 3:15).

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Perfected Church and Creation

The METANARRATIVE of scripture, therefore, tells the story of how God makes a way back to the tree of life. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Genesis 3:15 promise, and description of the new earth in Revelation 22 describes the center of the new city hosting the tree of life again:

Then 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 down 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. No 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. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There 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 ever and ever.

Revelation 22:1-5

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Perfected Church and Creation

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil no longer exists because evil has been destroyed. The imagery is significant, the world starts with two trees in a garden, and ends with one tree in a city.

It is also significant that the new city is not heaven, but a PHYSICAL city on the EARTH. Resurrection in scripture must be interpreted as physical and bodily.

The end of Revelation also depicts what is called the "WEDDING Feast of the Lamb." This celebration is a vindication of the church's faith. The conclusion of Revelation is the fulfillment of every one of God's promises - a reckoning of history and the VINDICATION of our faith.

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Application

The message of Revelation is a call to stay faithful to our King, rejecting any attempt to seek refuge in the kingdoms of this world instead.

"[Revelation] is a book of prophetic challenge and uncomfortable demands because most of us understandably like what Empire claims to offer: security, purpose, victory, control of history, sacred honor, duty, and blessing, and we are willing to offer our minds, hearts, and bodies in return. With our vision corrected by the Lamb and our focus on him, we seem next to disengage our minds, hearts, and bodies from all that promises life but delivers death. We need to resist the seduction of normalcy and of civil religion and engage the world in new ways and on new terms. We do not accept or participate in the sacralization of secular power: political, military, economic, or any other form. Rather than placing a rapture bumper sticker on our cars - "In case of rapture, this vehicle will be unmanned" - we announce, with words and deeds … - that we follow the Lamb." – Michael Gorman



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