

St Andrew's Church, Corbridge

Exploring the Book of Revelation: Session 1

Revelation – an exciting book; a challenging book; a puzzling book.

Either: an improper fascination – many cults and fundamentalist Christians become obsessed with wild and speculative interpretations;
or, the book is simply ignored as too difficult to handle.

Background

Revelation was probably written towards the end of the first century during the reign of the Emperor Domitian (81-96AD).

The Emperor was demanding recognition of his divine status ('Caesar is Lord').

There was active persecution of Christians for not acknowledging this (AD 93-96).

Many questions: Who is in charge of the world? Who is Lord? How can we resist persecution? What if we die? What is the Christian response to an evil and totalitarian State? Will God's kingdom prevail? What will happen to the powers of evil and wickedness? These are the issues the book addresses.

The author is called John, who was on exile on the Island of Patmos because of his testimony to Jesus. Traditionally he was equated with John the Apostle, but more likely, was another John, with links to the Apostle's community in Ephesus.

What kind of Book is Revelation?

It is a '*revelation*' (1.1) – Greek *apocalypse* = 'uncovering', 'showing forth'.

This is a revelation of Jesus Christ to John of what must 'soon take place'.

It is a '*prophecy*' (1.3) John is Jesus' mouthpiece and so speaks God's word to his hearers. The Book draws heavily on the prophetic books of the Old Testament.

It is a '*letter*' to 'the seven churches that are in Asia' (1.4); this refers to the whole book; there are also 7 short letters to each Church in chapters 2-3. The 7 Churches are all in modern-day Turkey (Asia Minor). 'Seven' for Jews was a 'perfect number'; the 7 Churches therefore represent the whole Church in every place.

Revelation belongs to the *Apocalyptic* tradition of Biblical literature. This tradition began about 200 years before Jesus and extended to the 2nd century AD. Some strands of it are in the Bible e.g. the Book of Daniel in the OT, and passages like Mark 13, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Jude, 2 Peter, in the NT. Most apocalyptic writing is outside the Bible (e.g. 1 Enoch & 4 Ezra) and it developed in what we call the Inter-Testamental period.



Characteristics of apocalyptic writing

- secret revelations especially about the end of time
- a context of present crisis, relating faith to the crisis
- use of vivid and sometimes bizarre visions, symbols and images, often including dreams and ecstasies
- use of allegory
- use of elaborate codes e.g. coded numbers or colours – which may be interpreted to give hidden information
- a sense that the present time is moving towards a climax, but at the end of time ('this age') God will act decisively ushering in the 'new age'. There is thus continuity and discontinuity.
- the present age is under the power of massive forces of evil (the Satan = 'Adversary', evil spiritual powers) bringing suffering; the present age must pass away and the new age be established. (Note some apocalyptic writing is utterly pessimistic; the New Testament never loses sight of the fact that God works in history; he has not abandoned the world).
- the coming of the new age will be preceded by a time of distress and suffering
- judgment is taken very seriously
- the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead was developed during this period, along with belief in angels and demons
- the scope of apocalyptic writing is *epic* – embracing earth and heaven, the rise and fall of empires
- there is a cosmic spiritual battle; earthly conflict is part of a bigger spiritual struggle of good against evil

- through all of it, God is working his purpose out; ultimately there will be the triumph of good
- apocalyptic often has a strong moral message – the vindication and recompense of the righteous and the judgment of the wicked
- the judgment and destruction of all the powers of evil.

Implications for interpreting Revelation

- we must interpret it in the light of the apocalyptic tradition and so recognise that literary devices are being used
- we need humility; some of the meanings of the symbols and codes that John's readers would recognise have been lost to us
- as an epic, it is better to concentrate on the broad meaning, and not get too bogged down and lost in specifics; look at the big picture.

Structure of the Book

Chapter 1. 1-8	Prologue & introduction
Chapter 1. 9-20	a vision of the risen & exalted Jesus
Chapter 2, 3	letters to 7 Churches
Chapters 4, 5	John sees a vision of heaven
Chapters 6-19	Messianic judgment 7 seals (6.1 – 8.1) 7 trumpets (8-9, 11.15-18) 7 bowls (15-16)

These chapters are interspersed with strong promises about the Church

	7: the Church will overcome and be protected under trial
	10: the end is coming: the task of the Prophet
	11: the Church cannot be destroyed
	12-14: the Church in conflict with the State/God in conflict with Satan
	17: the fall of Babylon (Rome)
Chapter 19. 11-21	the coming of Christ
Chapter 20	the millennium & the final judgment
Chapters 21, 22	new heaven, new earth, new Jerusalem
	Conclusion: 'Yes, I am coming soon'.

Out three meetings

Today	Introduction and the picture of Jesus in Revelation
Next week	the judgment passages; does Revelation give a chronology of the last times? The millennium.
Final session	Revelation, evil and the victory of God.

The Place of Jesus

Revelation is clearly *Christian* apocalyptic, because of the central place given to the person of Jesus.

Read Revelation 1. 4-8

- Jesus as the 'faithful witness' (1.5) – he stood firm in his witness to the truth; he was persecuted, crucified; he can enable a persecuted Church to do the same
- 'firstborn from the dead' (1.5)
- 'ruler of the kings of the earth' – not Rome, not Caesar
- he loved us, and freed us from sin, made us a kingdom of priests (1.6; see Exodus 19.6) – Church as the new Israel
- 1.7 recalls Daniel 7.13; Zechariah 12.10

Read Daniel 7. 9-10, 13-14

As I watched, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his throne; his clothing was white as snow and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. ¹⁰ A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

¹³ As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

and Daniel 10. 4-6

⁴ On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris), ⁵ I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his waist. ⁶ His body was like beryl, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the roar of a multitude. ⁷ I, Daniel, alone saw the vision; the people who were with me did not see the vision, though a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled and hid themselves. ⁸ So I was left alone to see this great vision. My strength left me, and my complexion grew deathly pale, and I retained no strength. ⁹ When I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a trance, face to the ground.

Read Revelation 1. 12-18

What picture of Jesus emerges? The images and symbols of the vision:

- note Jesus standing in the midst of the 'lampstands' – the Churches (1.20)
- John's reaction: 1.17

Read Revelation 5

The sealed scroll – the divine plan to overcome the evil that has infected the world and the salvation God has already decreed

The Lion of the Tribe of Judah (5.5, see Genesis 49.9); the Root of David (Isaiah 11.1, 10) = Messianic titles

The Lion and the Lamb! Strength and sacrifice.

Only Jesus is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals – that is, initiate the process that will lead to the End.

Note the centrality of Jesus' death and resurrection: 5. 6, 9, 12

Note John's paradox: victory through his death.

He is the Lamb – John is probably thinking of the Passover Lamb, the one slain to bring deliverance

7 horns: 7= a perfect number. Horns (see Deut. 33.17) denoting perfect strength.

7 eyes (see Zechariah 4.10) – perfect sight; therefore, perfect knowledge; he sees all; nothing is hidden

5.11-14: Jesus, the object of worship. The cosmic Christ.

John sees unfolding history as being the time between the resurrection and Christ's appearing in glory:

Jesus came (Jesus of Nazareth, the historical Jesus)

Jesus is now exalted – he is at the centre of the throne of God

He will come again – the goal towards which history is moving.

Read Chapter 19. 6-10

Context: the heavenly 'Temple'; the place of God's throne.

This takes us forward to the Second Coming; context – the 'great whore' = Babylon (Rome); a symbol of corrupt and evil earthly power. God is now king.

- v. 7 – the marriage supper of the Lamb of the Incarnation, the union of the divine and the human in Christ; the union of Christ with the Church
- his bride is the Church who has 'made herself ready' – the Church's obedience
- given fine linen to wear – holiness as a gift
- eternal life pictured as the wedding feast.

Read Chapter 19. 11-16

The picture of Christ as victor, leading the armies of heaven.

- the names of Christ
- he comes as judge
- his name cannot be known – i.e. his nature is beyond human understanding
- the ‘war’ is not war in a literal sense, but the victory of good and love over hate and evil; in other words the victory of the Cross (see Isaiah 63 below).
- John draws on 3 OT passages, regarded as Messianic:

Isaiah 11. 3-5

He shall not judge by what his eyes see
or decide by what his ears hear,
⁴but with righteousness he shall judge for the poor
and decide with equity for the oppressed of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
⁵Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

Psalms 2. 7-9

I will tell of the decree of the LORD:
He said to me, “You are my son; today I have begotten you.
⁸Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage
and the ends of the earth your possession.
⁹You shall break them with a rod of iron
and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

Isaiah 63. 1-6

“Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah in garments stained crimson? Who is this so splendidly robed, marching in his great might?”

“It is I, announcing vindication, mighty to save.”

²“Why are your robes red and your garments like theirs who tread the winepress?”

³“I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their juice spattered on my garments, and I stained all my robes. ⁴For the day of vengeance was in my mind, and the year for my redeeming work had come. ⁵I looked, but there was no helper; I was abandoned, and there was no one to sustain me, so my own arm brought me victory, and my wrath sustained me. ⁶I trampled down peoples in my anger; I crushed them in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.”

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Exploring the Book of Revelation: Session 2

Does Revelation give a chronology of the last times? The issue of 'the Millennium'.

Introduction

- Revelation belongs to the apocalyptic genre of Biblical literature
- we need to remember 'the big picture'

A rough chronology of the middle of the Book:

After chapters 4 & 5:

7 Seals: (chapter 6-8.5): Jesus breaks the seven seals of the scroll; some of these inaugurate judgment (see 6.8; 6. 12, 13)

7 Trumpets: (chapters 8-9; 11. 15-18); a series of plagues and judgments on the earth.

7 Bowls (chapters 15-16): the bowls of God's wrath.

Revelation and History

4 main views:

a. **Revelation is essentially about the end of the first century.**

It refers to the reign of the Emperor Domitian and the years that preceded it. The judgments we read about would have been related to the years of persecution.

Now clearly, Revelation must have been relevant to John's hearers, but this can't be the only interpretation; after all, the world did not come to an end at the end of the first century.

b. **Revelation is essentially about the future. After chapter 5, the events are yet to be.**

Many Christian groups have claimed that their generation would herald the end times, and set in motion the sequence of 'events' in Revelation. But again, history marches on, rendering their interpretation void. But is the Book meant to be a linear chronology? Does it have nothing to say of the evils and sufferings of the past 2,000 years?

c. **Revelation is a panorama of world history; many of the events have already taken place (e.g. the Fall of Rome), but we still await the final times.**

This takes a more holistic view of the Book, but it still interprets it in terms of linear chronology, and tends to be dominated by European/North American concerns.

d. **Revelation is a spiritual collage.**

The events described are not 'real' events as described, but are an imaginative and symbolic narrative, using vivid images to show God's victory and the overthrow of evil. It therefore seeks to interpret the whole era of the Church, as the victory of Christ, achieved in his Cross and Resurrection, is worked out in the unfolding of human existence.

The central section – seals, trumpets, bowls, can illustrate this spiritual collage. This is concerned with the reality of evil and human sin.

The Seals: Chapter 6:

Seal 1: The White Horse: military power

Seal 2: The Red Horse: war and slaughter

Seal 3: The Black Horse: economic power

Seal 4: The Pale Green Horse: Death and Hades – war and natural disaster

Seal 5: The martyrs – how long?

Seal 6: signs in heaven; this is very similar to Jesus' apocalyptic teaching

[Chapter 7: the 'sealing' or protecting of God's people; the worship of heaven]

Seal 7: silence, and the great censer; the prayers of the saints

The trumpets: Chapters 8, 9

Trumpet 1: hail, fire and blood - a third of the earth burned

Trumpet 2: a burning mountain thrown into the sea – a third of the sea turned to blood

Trumpet 3: the star from heaven (Wormwood) – a third of the rivers became bitter

Trumpet 4: sun, moon & stars: a third of the light darkened

Trumpet 5: monster locusts with stings

Trumpet 6: the four angels of death – a third of humankind killed.

[Chapter 11: the two witnesses – see below]

Trumpet 7: The Victory of Messiah and the saints

The bowls: Chapter 16

Bowl 1: sores

Bowl 2: sea turned to blood

Bowl 3: rivers and springs turned to blood

Bowl 4: the sun – scorching people with fire

Bowl 5: kingdom of the beast turned to darkness

Bowl 6: foul spirits like frogs

Bowl 7: 'It is done'.

Note how much of this imagery echoes the Plagues of Egypt, which in Exodus are the prelude to deliverance and salvation.

Is this sequence of 21 descriptions a long linear narrative of God's judgment from the time of John to the Second Coming of Jesus? Are the last days to be one long catalogue of grisly divine judgment?

Does it encourage us to gloat over the suffering of the wicked, or paralyse us because we become totally afraid of the future?

Is it a chronology: e.g., 1234567 1234567 1234567?

Or, is it a parallel sequence, spanning the time from Jesus' first coming to his second coming?

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If so, John is not so much giving us a calendar of history, but rather setting our experience within a framework of God's purposes which will be fulfilled through history.

John's Pattern

If you look at the 7th item in each series, they all seem to refer to the revealing of Christ in glory.

7th seal - Read the Sixth Seal (Revelation 6. 12-17) and the Seventh Seal (Revelation 8. 1-5).

In the 6th seal, John uses language very similar to that of Jesus when he spoke of the period just before his Parousia – see Matthew 24. 29-31; Acts 2. 19-21. John has brought us to the end of history; all that awaits is Jesus second coming.

7th Trumpet – Read Revelation 11. 15-19. As we considered last week this section must refer to the Second Coming – the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.

7th Bowl – Read Revelation 16. 17. 'It is done!' 15.1 reminds us that with these bowls the wrath of God is ended – the 7th bowl represents the end of the week – and so the beginning of God's Kingdom that can never end.

Remember seven is a 'perfect number' in Jewish thought. Seven embraces the whole of human history between the Incarnation and the Parousia.

Note also that each pattern of seven judgments roughly corresponds to the sequence Jesus expounds in Mark 13 and Matthew 24:

- wars and rumours of war
- earthquakes, famines
- idolatrous sacrilege
- false Messiahs
- sun and moon darkened, falling stars
- powers of heaven shaken
- false prophets performing great signs and omens
- coming of the Son of Man

Jesus gives us one view of it; John gives us 3.

A tricky passage – Read Revelation 11. 1-13

- measuring the Temple cf Ezekiel 40; Zechariah 2; but note the earthly Temple was destroyed in AD 70: this seems to be the 'spiritual Temple' – the Church
- 42 months i.e. 3.5 years, half of 'seven'
- 3.5 months = 1,260 days
- 'two witnesses' who have power to shut up the sky and turns water into blood and bring plagues – this is clearly a reference to Elijah and the drought (1 Kings 17) and Moses and the plagues – symbols of the whole people of God cf. the transfiguration narratives of the Gospels. Elijah's drought lasted for 1, 260 days or 42 months
- witnesses as the 2 olive trees (see Zechariah 4 where the two witnesses are Zerubbabel the governor of Judah and Jeshua the High Priest, who rebuilt the Jerusalem Temple after the return from Babylon), and 2 lampstands (lampstands are a symbol of the Churches in Revelation 1).
- 3.5 years seems to be a symbol of the present age of the Church – moving towards perfection
- the beast - see next week!
- the seeming defeat of the Church v. 7-8 for 3.5 days i.e. a short time
- the seeming victory of evil (Sodom and Egypt)
- the rising of the Church vv. 11-13 – cf Ezekiel 37 the valley of the dry bones.
- the triumph of the Church; only a tenth will be lost; the great act of salvation for the majority.

Seals, Plagues, Bowls – what is the big picture? This seems to be a graphic and highly symbolic depiction of human sin and wickedness being laid bare for what it

is. That all such sin and wickedness is being, and will be, judged by the God of righteousness and justice. But God's act of salvation, through the Church, is also being revealed in history and despite the apparent weakness of the Church and the persecution it suffers.

There is a deeper question – what is it that lies at the heart of all sin and wickedness? We will explore that next week.

The Millennium

Read Revelation 20. 1-6

Revelation 20 gives the following order:

- the binding of the Dragon/Serpent/Satan
- the 1,000-year reign of Christ with his saints
- the release of Satan
- the destruction of Satan
- the Great White Throne

We will consider some of this next week.

Many Christians, mainly of a fundamentalist, literalist view, take this as a chronology of the end, a literal 1,000-year rule of Christ on earth. But this is the only reference to a 'millennium' in the NT. Why should there be an 'interim' kingdom? For this reason, most main-line theologians regard the millennium as symbolic, not literal. Note the reference to the martyrs v. 4; the Church has long venerated its martyrs who are regarded as having a primacy of honour in heaven as they followed Jesus completely by giving up their lives.

20.4 seems to echo Daniel 7 – where 'thrones are set in place' with tens of thousands attending the Ancient of Days and power and authority is given to 'one like a son of man'. John draws on this imagery to depict the martyrs reigning with Christ and sharing in his final judgment. So, John is again, re-playing the tape. Chapter 20 is not the chronological sequel to Chapter 19, but takes us back over the whole sweep of salvation-history in Christ. Remember that the Satan was decisively defeated at the Cross, although still has (limited) power to deceive and provoke wickedness. The 'millennium' seems to be a symbolic number covering the period from the Cross to the Parousia. The victory of Christ is already manifested by the saints and martyrs of heaven. The binding of Satan v 2 may suggest that the power of evil is limited until the end, when for a while it will have one last frenzied activity before its total destruction.

But more on that, next week.

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Exploring the Book of Revelation: Session 3

Revelation, Evil and the Victory of God

Over the last two sessions we have set Revelation firmly in the apocalyptic tradition of biblical writing and theology. I have suggested that we don't have a simple chronology of events from chapters 1-22, but a sophisticated theological exposition of the present 'age of the Church', the time between the Incarnation and the Parousia.

Some realities to keep before us:

Chapter 4: The Throne

- an open door in heaven
- John 'in the Spirit' – remember this is the Lord's Day (Rev. 1.10); John at worship suddenly sees the true locus of Christian worship – the heavenly throne-room
- The 24 elders
- The 4 living creatures
- God as creator

Chapter 7: The Church secure in God's care

- Context: at the end of the 6th seal; judgment on the earth is held back until 144,000 are sealed
- seal as a mark of ownership and protection
- 144,000 – a symbolic number, designating
 - the 12 Tribes of Israel
 - the 12 Apostles
- 144,000 or 12 x 12,000 is a diagram of the whole people of God
- In chapter 14.1-5, the 144,000 appear again, the 'redeemed from the earth' i.e. the whole Church in heaven
- 7.9: 'the great multitude that no one could count' – this too is the whole people of God, the same group as the symbolic 144,000.

The big picture:

- The Church on earth is protected (sealed) by God even in the midst of persecution
- The Church will share the life of heaven and know God's eternal care (7.15-17).

The Beasts and the Dragon (Revelation 12, 13)

1 red dragon and 2 beasts? Is this a kind of evil response to the Trinity? This is not dualism or equal and opposites; the power of God is much stronger.

Read Revelation 12. 1-6

An allegory

- The woman (v. 1) represents Israel and the Church, with an allusion to the Blessed Virgin Mary – see Genesis 37.9, where the children of Israel are depicted by these signs – sun, moon and stars
- v. 2 – the story of Israel up to the birth of the Messiah
- v. 3 – the red dragon – see the next passage
- v. 4 – the dragon seeks to destroy the child
- v. 5 – the birth of Messiah – who will rule the nations with a rod of iron (Psalm 2.9) and his exaltation
- v. 6 – the age of the Church – 3.5 years/1, 260 days – see last week's notes

Read Revelation 12. 7-17

War in heaven

- a cosmic battle in the heavenlies
- the identity of the dragon – the Satan
- note the tradition of the Satan as a 'son of God' (Job 1) – a member of the heavenly court.
- in Job, the Satan is the 'adversary'; here the deceiver; in the Inter-Testamental period the development of the Satan as the tempter, and spiritual power of evil
- there was a tradition that the Satan rebelled against God and was expelled from heaven cf. Jesus' words, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven' (Luke 10.18) – see Isaiah 14. 12-20
- the figure of Michael, the great Archangel of Daniel 10 – the defender of God's people
- the Satan defeated (thrown down to earth) but not destroyed
- the martyrs have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb – the Cross v. 11.
- the conflict between the Church and the dragon (vv. 13-17)
- the big picture - there is a corresponding *spiritual* power of evil behind human sin

The Two Beasts (Revelation 13)

- note Daniel 7 speaks of 4 beasts, representing 4 Empires
- John's first beast combines all 4, and historically it represents Rome and therefore political power that becomes corrupt

- John may be referring to Nero's death in AD69 when 3 contenders occupied the throne in quick succession; there were rumours that Nero had 'come back to life'; Jerusalem was destroyed in AD70; and persecution broke out against the Church
- John's second beast is difficult to interpret; some argue that the second beast is *religious* rather than *political*; or that the second beast is the Emperor working with the first beast, the State, or the rise of a second tyrant
- certainly, the number 666 (v. 18) seems to refer to Nero, but of course, many 'Neros' have arisen in history
- the big picture – what happens when the State becomes a monster? When those with absolute power rule monstrously? See v. 9 – where John exhorts his readers while being very realistic about what they are facing.

Babylon (chapters 17, 18)

A second woman is introduced, but note the contrast with the woman in Chapter 12.

The symbol (mystery) of Babylon

- the tower of Babel (Genesis 11) where human sought to usurp the throne of heaven
- the place of exile – the Jewish captivity in Babylon
- Babylon in Revelation as the earthly city which opposes God
- note Babylon's pride and arrogance
- for John's readers this would mean Rome
- for us, worldly powers that become idolatrous, corrupt and sadistic
- she how powerful Babylon seems from the world's standpoint and how flimsy from God's (17. 15-18)
- we don't belong to Babylon
- the overthrow of Babylon
- the big picture: earthly powers that align with the powers of darkness and serve them will be destroyed
- we seek another city.

The Victory of Love (Chapters 19-22)

The judgment of evil

- the destruction of the beast and false prophet (19. 19, 20)
- the destruction of the devil (20.10)
- the great white throne: the judgment of humanity (20. 11-13)
- the destruction of Death and Hades – the 'Second Death' (20. 14)
- the big picture – the purging and destruction of sin, evil, death and hell.

New heaven, new earth, new Jerusalem

Read Revelation 21. 1-7

The fulness of new creation

- note the contrast with 'Babylon'
- union with God (the image of the bride)
- God 'at home' with humanity
- note - God speaks vv. 3- 8; we rarely hear the voice of God in Revelation till now
- 'the first (old) things have gone – paraclesis
- all things new

The New Jerusalem (Revelation 21. 9-27)

- 12 gates, 12 angels, 12 tribes of Israel cf. the 144,000
- Foundations – the 12 apostles
- its vast measurements – a perfect cube – 1500 x 1500 x 1500 miles cf the Holy of Holies of the earthly temple was a perfect cube (1 Kings 6)
- the use of jewels to designate beauty and splendour
- no temple, because God is fully dwelling among his people
- no sun or moon; God as its light and the Lamb as its lamp;
- its gates always open
- no night, nothing unclean.

The River of the water of life (Revelation 22. 1-5)

- John is drawing on Genesis 2. 10 and Ezekiel 43-47; the life-giving River
- the tree of life is there – a restored Eden (see Genesis 3. 24; cf. the Cross as the tree of life)
- its leaves for the healing of the nations
- God's throne and the Lamb in the midst cf. Revelation 4, 5
- the perfecting of God's servants who see God's face

Conclusion

- 'Yes, I am coming soon'.
- a gracious invitation: 22. 17, 18

The Message of Revelation

- I have suggested that Revelation is concerned with the age of the Church (set between the two 'comings' of Christ) and is like a musical score with various parallel voices or instruments, hence the seals, trumpets and bowls run in

parallel – 3 depictions of the one reality; if sometimes it seems discordant it is moving towards perfect harmony

- evil is a reality in human experience, and while evil was decisively defeated at the Cross and Resurrection, in the mystery of time it is still able to manifest its destructive power; Revelation lays bare just how utterly wicked evil is
- evil is not simply the sum of individual acts of sin and wickedness, but also has an underlying spiritual reality, symbolised by the dragon and the beasts
- Jesus warned of wars, persecution, ‘earth-shattering events’; they should not surprise us
- but God’s purposes are certain and salvation is certain – God has ‘sealed us’ if we continue true to our profession
- while God desires the State to be his servant (see Romans 13), when the State usurps the place of God and becomes a ‘monster’, then Christians cannot collude with this; hence, our Christian political engagement is necessary
- Revelation sets before us the vision of the destruction of all sin, evil, and death
- the vision of the new heaven and the new earth, the new Jerusalem, witnesses to all that the new creation promises, the uniting of heaven and earth where at last God is at home with his people
- ‘In the beginning was the Word (John 1); in the End is Christ, Alpha and Omega (22.13); he has broken the seals setting in motion God’s eternal purposes; he is the key to all existence, ‘yesterday, today and for ever’ (Hebrews 13)
- “‘Yes, I am coming soon’. Even so, Come, Lord Jesus.” (Revelation 22. 20).