

You Pick The Sermon: How Are Genesis and Revelation Related?

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Genesis 1:1-18,2:7-10; Revelation 21:9-12,22-25, 22:1-5

Friends, our final Scripture reading this evening is selected passages from Revelation 21 and 22. Listen now to God's Word. "One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. 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."

Do any of you read the last chapter of a book before you start it? My dad was famous for it. He would always turn to the back of the book first and read a few pages. I always thought he was kinda nuts for doing it. But he had a good reason for it, he said. How can you know if a book is worth finishing if you know you're going to hate the ending? Me, I like surprises. The less I know about a movie or novel going in, the better. But my dad was on to something. A great story that ends badly might not be worth reading in the first place. It's the same reason that a lot of people hate trick endings. If a movie pulls the rug out from under you before it ends, you might feel like you've wasted your money.

Lots of people feel that way about the book of Revelation. There's nothing else quite like it in the whole Bible, save for a few chapters of Daniel. There are strange beasts and bizarre worldwide phenomenon and very little that looks like the real world. And that's strange, because the Bible is different from most religious books from other cultures because it is grounded in real history. God intervenes in real events, and we can look back in history and say, "Yes, that happened." While there are some touchpoints we can understand, we can get lost in Revelation.

So when I got this week's You Pick The Sermon question, "How Are Genesis and Revelation Related?" I was excited and nervous at the same time. In some ways, they are nothing alike. Genesis is much easier to read; it makes a lot more sense. Even when God directly intervenes, it's in a way we understand. Revelation has very few things we can immediately understand; the images are confusing, and it's almost dreamlike.

However, in critical ways, they are much the same. We're going to talk about that tonight – how these books are interconnected. But we come to worship God and grow in our love of Him too, so we're not just going to do a book review. We're going to see how this interconnection speaks to what God has done in our world and what He's doing, and why we can count on Him in every situation.

There's an amazing pattern that we can find between the structure of Genesis and Revelation, and it helps us understand what both books are doing. It uses a very popular structure from ancient literature that's not very far from structures we are used to. Our poetry follows rhyming conventions. Let's think about *Green Eggs and Ham*, the famous tale by Dr. Seuss. "I do not like them in a house. I do not like them with a mouse. I do not like them here or there. I do not like them anywhere. I do not like green eggs and ham. I do not like them, Sam-I-am." The rhyme scheme follows an AABCC pattern. And if you look through the book, it gets more complex than that, with multiple versions of the rhyme scheme reappearing throughout the poem. That's why we love it as kids.

The Jewish people and other local cultures wrote in a special form just like we write in poetry. The pattern was ABCCBA. It didn't just apply to poetry but also to things like laws, historical books, and more. It wasn't about rhyming, either, but about concepts. It was like a flower – you go from the edge to the center and back out to the edge again.

There are three major sections to Genesis. The first is God's new creation. That's section A. Then section B is about humanity's fall into sin and God's patience until He brings destruction of the world through the flood, preserving Noah's family through it all. Section C is the rest of the book, which details how God chose to make Abraham's people His special people that He would bless, and through them all people would eventually be blessed.

Revelation provides the matching set. In the opening chapters of Revelation, Jesus writes to His own special people, to the churches, to warn them, correct them, and prepare them for what is to come. That's concept C – God preparing His people. Then we see the continuing sinfulness of humanity and God's patience until finally He returns and puts an end to the world as we know it. That's concept B. Finally, Revelation ends with the picture of an incredible, sprawling new heaven and new earth that come together at the new Jerusalem. That's concept A. These two books, written 1500 years apart, are complete bookends to the story God has been telling throughout history, and they are written in such a way that the ancients would have recognized the pattern.

Now we might say, "Hey, that's all well and good for them, but since I'm not from a 2000-year-old culture, I could never spot that." And you're right. That's why there are far more parallels.

Identity of the serpent
Promises fulfilled of the messiah
City filled with Edenic imagery