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 Revelation 22:6-21  
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# COME, LORD JESUS

*SERIES: THE SEEN AND THE UNSEEN*

Today we reach the end of the book of Revelation after a journey of six years. Today we emerge from the visions into the epilogue. Using the analogy of an art gallery, we have emerged from the rooms in which hang the paintings, and find ourselves back in the foyer. We were in this same foyer on our way into the gallery: Revelation has both a prologue (1:1-8) and an epilogue (22:6-21), and they share many similarities. The termination of the visions at 22:5 might tempt people to switch off, to stop paying attention, just as moviegoers rise to leave as soon as the credits start rolling. But this would be a mistake. Though the epilogue lacks the dazzle of the visions, it is important that we read it. It is also important that we not show up late and miss the prologue. These two bookends give important guidance on how to understand the book.

## The Prologue

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

John,

To the seven churches in the province of Asia:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

Look, he is coming with the clouds,  
 and every eye will see him,  
 even those who pierced him;  
 and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.

So shall it be! Amen.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” (Rev 1:1-8 NIV)

## The Epilogue

The angel said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.”

“Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.”

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said

to me, “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!”

Then he told me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.”

“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.”

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen. (Rev 22:6-21)

## What is the Book of Revelation?

What is the book of Revelation? The prologue and epilogue tell us that it is simultaneously three things: a revelation, a prophecy, and a letter. Each of these three categories is frequently misunderstood.

### 1. Revelation

The book announces itself as “The revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:1). It is an apocalypse, indeed *The Apocalypse*, derived from the Greek word used here for revelation. Unfortunately the word apocalypse has come to mean “great or total devastation.”<sup>1</sup> The book does indeed contain images of great or total devastation, but this is not the primary revelation of the book. An apocalypse is an uncovering or revealing of things otherwise hidden. This is reflected in my title for this series: *The Seen and the Unseen*. This unveiling occurs on both

temporal and spatial levels: what will happen in the future, and what is happening now in realms unseen to the naked eye.

The prologue tells that this revelation is given to show “what must soon take place” (1:1). The main sequence of visions is introduced by an angel telling John, “I will show you what must take place” (4:1). Now the epilogue tells us that God “sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place” (22:6). What must happen? Twice we are told that it has happened: “It is done!” The earthly city Babylon must fall (16:17), and the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, must descend (21:6). This must happen because God has made humanity to dwell in his presence. He will not allow the earthly city, where people live outside his presence, to flourish indefinitely. At the end stands the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, where God’s people dwell with him and see his face.

This revelation is also an unveiling of things going on now in otherwise-unseen realms. John sees into heaven and into the Abyss. In heaven he sees the one seated upon the throne and he sees the Lamb. In the Abyss he sees evil forces opposed to the rule of God.

This is the “revelation of Jesus Christ.” While this does mean the revelation belonging to Jesus which he passes on to others, it also means the revelation about who Jesus is. Revelation has a very high Christology, a very high understanding of who Jesus Christ is. In the prologue God introduces himself, “I am the Alpha and the Omega” (1:8). John’s first vision is of the exalted Christ, who announces himself, “I am the First and the Last” (1:17). In the closing visions God describes himself, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End” (21:6). In the epilogue Jesus proclaims himself, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (22:13). All things begin and end with God. This much was clear in the Old Testament where God described himself, “I am the first and I am the last” (Isa 44:6; 48:12). Apart from him there is no God. Yet here we see these titles applied to Jesus without compromising monotheism. Jesus Christ is on the throne alongside God, receiving the worship of the heavenly choir, yet God is still one.

All things begin and end with God, but there with him in the beginning and at the end is the Lord Jesus Christ. And there in the middle are God and Christ together. God has always been on his heavenly throne, but in the middle of history John sees Jesus on that throne as well. John sees God worshiped as Creator, as he has always been. He sees Jesus worshiped as Redeemer, for through Jesus God has turned the world around. But he has done so in an unexpected way: the Lion has conquered by being the slain Lamb. The slain but risen Lamb is God’s answer to all the evil arising from the Abyss. This is the hinge on which all history turns. The Old Testament, from which John draws so much of his imagery, pointed forward to Jesus. Therefore in the epilogue Jesus describes himself as “the Root and Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star” (22:16); he is the one who was promised.

So, this book is a revelation, an unveiling of things otherwise unseen. On the horizontal plane, this is the revelation of the things which must happen: “the kingdom of the world” must “become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever” (11:15). On the vertical plane this is the revelation of the supreme place of Jesus Christ in how God brings this about.

## 2. Prophecy

This book is more than just a revelation; it is identified also as a prophecy (1:3; 22:7,10,18-19). Here too we frequently misunderstand the term “prophecy,” taking it to mean the prediction of future

events. A prophecy is a proclamation from God to affect current behavior. It may involve warnings of future judgment or promises of future blessing, but those are given to influence current behavior. John is God’s prophet, his mouthpiece, to the churches. The whole book is a prophecy, God’s words for his people, proclaimed through his servants John and the other prophets. Within this, the seven messages are more focused prophetic proclamations to the seven churches. This prophecy is trinitarian. Each of the messages is a prophetic proclamation by Jesus. Each is also an appeal by the Spirit to the churches who are urged to hear what he is saying. This same Spirit is at work in the prophets, conveying God’s words through them. Both the whole book and the seven messages contain a mixture of warning and promise directed to God’s people, designed to affect their current behavior. God’s prophecies here, as everywhere, comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. The prologue pronounces a blessing on the one who hears the words of this prophecy (1:3). The epilogue pronounces a blessing on the one who keeps the words of the prophecy (22:7).

## 3. Letter

Revelation is more than just a revelation and a prophecy; it is also a letter. Here too there is misunderstanding: we commonly think of the book containing seven letters, but the whole book is a single letter addressed to all seven churches. These are not all the churches of Asia, but as seven they are representative of all churches. The so-called letters are really prophetic messages to each church. The book contains a standard epistolary beginning: “John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you...” (1:4), and a standard ending: “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen” (22:21). It was a public letter to each of these churches, for in each it was read aloud. It is a pastoral letter, written to help the believers in these churches live their daily lives. It was written by John, a man with a pastor’s heart who presumably knew these churches and their members.

## The audience

This apocalyptic prophetic letter is communicated through a chain of revelation. It starts with God. Because the words start with God, they are trustworthy and true (22:6). God gave the revelation to Jesus to show his servants. Jesus “made it known” to these servants “by sending his angel to his servant John” (1:1). This angel acted as John’s guide or interpreter in all that he saw and heard. John wrote all that he had seen and heard in a letter and sent it to seven churches in Asia. As each of these churches gathered, a reader proclaimed the whole book as the rest of the church listened. That’s the setting in which this book was intended to be encountered: a church gathered together. Many scholars suggest that this gathering would be a liturgical one for worship and the eucharist.

There is thus a chain of revelation: from God to Jesus to the interpreting angel to John to the reader to the hearers. God, Jesus, the angel and John all affirm the reliability of this revelation. In the epilogue it can be difficult to discern whether it is Jesus, the angel or John who is speaking. In the end it doesn’t really matter because each speaks with the authority of God who stands at the head of the chain. In addition to this chain, God speaks through his Spirit to the prophets, and he speaks through his Spirit to the churches.

Revelation is addressed to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia. These seven are representative of all the churches of Asia, all the churches of the late first century, and all churches throughout

time and space. I think every church can find itself addressed in the seven prophetic messages, and certainly we are all addressed by the book as a whole. These seven churches were living in a world that was hostile to the following of Jesus. These churches differ considerably in their spiritual health. Smyrna and Philadelphia suffer persecution but are spiritually healthy. Ephesus and Sardis have the appearance of much life, but underneath they are cold and dead. Pergamum and Thyatira have compromised with the surrounding world. Laodicea has nothing to commend itself for it has shut the door on Jesus. Each of these churches needs a revelation of Jesus, a prophetic proclamation from God, and a pastoral letter from John. Each needs ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches and eyes to see the revelation of Jesus Christ.

## The Life to which Revelation calls us

The revelation is given, the prophecy is proclaimed, and the letter is written to influence the daily behavior of the Christians within these seven churches. These Christians are called to persevere in holy living, in worship, in faithful witness, and in eager longing for Jesus.

### 1. Holy living

The epilogue pronounces a blessing on those who wash their robes (22:14). Previously John has seen the martyred saints in heaven; these who have persevered through tribulation “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14). In the imagery of Revelation, the donning of these robes is not just a one-time event in the past, but an ongoing life of holy living, following in the footsteps of the Lamb. Those who persevere in this holy living are those who hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. These are the victors, the conquerors, the overcomers. At the end of their journey, they are granted admittance to the tree of life and the new Jerusalem.

This book is a call to holy living. It also contains many warnings of the consequences of unholy living. The promise to those who wash their robes is immediately followed by the statement that evil-doers end up outside the holy city (22:15). These are the idolaters who pursue what is false. Their destiny is not the new Jerusalem but the lake of fire. The angel starkly states that the wrong-doer will continue to do wrong (22:11). But he who pursues what is right and holy is urged to persevere.

Throughout the book the hearers are presented with two ways of living life: the true and the false, the holy and the unholy, the way of Babylon or the way of the new Jerusalem, the way of the beast and the harlot or the way of the Lamb. Unfortunately, the ways of the false, the unholy, have intruded themselves into some of the churches.

### 2. True Worship

The call to holy living includes a call to worship that which is true. As I will never tire of saying, Revelation is a book about worship. It's not a question of whether you worship, but whom you worship. Everyone worships, everyone that is except the holy trinity (God, Lamb and Spirit) and the unholy trinity (dragon, beast and false prophet). In the realm of the true, God is rightfully worshiped as Creator. He has placed the Lamb on his throne, who now rightfully receives worship as Redeemer. The Spirit moves through the prophets and the churches to foster true worship. In the realm of the false, the dragon has placed the beast on his throne, and the false prophet deceives the world into worshiping this imposter. Even John can be deceived.

The epilogue shows him bowing in worship at the feet of the angel, in response to what he has seen and heard (22:8). The angel has to dissuade him, commanding him to worship God alone.

The book ends with a warning to those who add or subtract from this book of prophecy (22:18-19). John is likely drawing on imagery from Deuteronomy where Moses warns the Israelites not to add or subtract from the Lord's commands he is giving them (Deut 4:1-2). That warning is given in the context of a reminder to Israel of their propensity to idolatry. This is a propensity in all of us. Our hearts are endless factories of idolatry. We so easily give our affections to things or people that are not worthy of them. We have been made for God and our hearts are restless till they find rest in him. Revelation should cultivate our affections for God and the Lamb, should make us long to see God's face, should make us eager to add our voices to the heavenly chorus around the throne.

The seven messages show that idolatry has penetrated into some of the churches. Pergamum has been tolerating the teaching of the Nicolaitans and the teaching of Balaam (2:14-15). Thyatira has been tolerating the false prophetess Jezebel (2:20). The teaching of the Nicolaitans, Balaam and Jezebel is the same: misleading God's people into adultery and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. The adultery is spiritual idolatry, though it could be physical as well. The eating is feasting in the idolatrous temples of the non-gods.

True prophecy fosters the worship of God; false prophecy diverts worship away from God. Throughout this book the worship of the Lamb alongside God is classed as true worship, as true prophecy.

If, in reading Revelation, your heart is moved to fill in your time-tables, you are missing the point of the book. This should quicken our spiritual affections, intensify our appetite for God and Christ, and evoke songs of praise and worship. I hope that over the past six years I have enabled you to read this book in a way that cultivates your affections for God and the Lamb.

### 3. Faithful witness

Revelation is a call to faithful witness. In the greeting at the beginning of the letter Jesus is described as the faithful witness (1:5). He both bore witness to God's word and he was that word. The world rejected this faithful witness, putting him to death. But God vindicated his faithful witness, raising him to life and exalting him to heaven there to share his throne. God's people are called to follow in the footsteps of the Lamb. We are called to a life of faithful witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. This isn't about how many copies of the *Four Spiritual Laws* we hand out. It's about how we live our lives. In all that we say and do we proclaim that it is God the Creator of all who is on the throne, that he has conquered evil through the slaying and resurrection of the Lamb, and that he has enthroned Jesus as Lord of all. We proclaim this gospel at all times, using words when necessary. The world may reject this witness, putting us to death. In America this is unlikely, but there are many places in the world today where God's faithful witnesses are being killed. In this, as in all things, we are called to follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

Revelation presents a black and white world. There are only two sets of people: evil-doers who worship the beast, bear his mark, and live in Babylon versus the holy saints who worship God and the Lamb, bear his seal, and are headed for the new Jerusalem. The epilogue shows that in these days when the end is near, as it has been ever since the death and resurrection of the Lamb, evil-doers will continue to do evil, while the holy are called to persevere in holiness

(22:11). But people are not locked into these positions. The devil had formerly deceived all people into opposing God, but Christ is plundering Satan's house, redeeming a people for God from every nation, language, tribe and tongue. This book contains the gospel of God's grace in Christ. The thirsty one is invited to come and take the free gift of the water of life (22:17). It will cost him nothing other than admission of his thirst and of his inability to find living water anywhere else. God gives freely to those who finally realize their need.

God uses the faithful witness of the saints in this gospel outreach. His judgments do not bring about repentance. Instead it is the death and resurrection of his faithful witnesses that finally brings rebels to give glory to God: the death and resurrection of the Lamb, and the death and resurrection of those who follow the Lamb.

But this gospel invitation serves also a warning. It is possible for the churches to forget their need for God's life-giving waters. This is what has happened in Laodicea, where the church boasts, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing," not realizing that it is "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (3:17).

#### 4. Longing for Jesus

Three times in the epilogue Jesus says, "I am coming soon" (22:7, 12, 20). Throughout the book Jesus says "I am coming" seven yea ten times (seven times with one verb, three times with a synonym). But this statement by Jesus can be a promise or a warning; again it comforts the afflicted while afflicting the comfortable. For the churches in Ephesus (2:5), Pergamum (2:16) and Sardis (3:5) these words are a warning of judgment. For the churches in Thyatira (2:25) and Philadelphia (3:11) they are a promise of salvation. One of the seven beatitudes is a blessing upon the one who stays alert for the coming of Jesus (16:15).

So excited is John at this prospect of the coming of Jesus that he excitedly writes in the prologue, "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him," to which he adds, "So shall it be! Amen" (1:7).

In the epilogue, "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!'" (22:17). God himself, speaking through his Spirit, animates the church to cry for Jesus to return. The one who hears, that is, the one who hears this prophecy, who hears what God is saying through his prophets and his Spirit to the churches, adds his voice, "Come!"

The book ends with Jesus, the one who bears witness to all the things in the book, saying, "Yes, I am coming soon." To which John responds, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (22:20). Is that your response when we get to the end of the book: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus"? If not then you've probably misread the book. Are you ready for Jesus to come? If he were to come tonight would you be delighted because you long for him, or would you be disappointed because there are still so many things you are hoping and longing for here on earth?

Like the seven churches in Asia, we live in a world that is hostile to holy living, to true worship, to faithful witness, and to proper longings. In America we don't face the tyranny of the beast, but, especially here in Silicon Valley, we live amidst the idolatrous seductions of Babylon. We need this book; we need this revelation of Jesus, this prophetic word from God to his people through his Spirit, and this pastoral letter from John. May we have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

We are called to follow the Lamb wherever he goes. Our Lamb has conquered, let us follow him.

*Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.*

*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. (Rev 1:4b-6)*

1. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004).

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