

Commentary on the Revelation

- I. Prologue, 1:1-20
- II. “The Things Which Are”, 2:1-3:22
- III. “The Things That Shall be,” 4:1-22:5
 - A. The divine right to judge and reward, 4:1-5:14
 - B. The divine judgment of God’s enemies, 6:1-19:21
 - C. The coming of Christ and His triumph over His archenemy.
20:1-15

- D. The eternal state, 21:1-22:5
 - 1) The New Jerusalem: God among His people, 21:1-8
 - 2) The New Jerusalem: The climax retold, 21:9-22:5
 - a) The overall vision of the city, vv. 9-14
 - b) The measurements of the city, vv. 15-17
 - c) The material of the city, vv. 18-21
 - d) The internal features of the city, vv. 22-27
 - e) God’s presence in the city, 22:1-5

What is most intriguing, perhaps, in these verses is the interconnection of 22:1-5 with Gen. 2. The first garden is restored in the second garden/ city. This metaphor of God dwelling among His people are the bookends of the Bible, the beginning and the end. The beginning, Eden, was blighted because of the serpent; the “New Eden” will not because the “serpent of old” will have been banished to eternal torment.

- (1) The river of life, vv. 1-2a

In Gen. 2:10 there was a river in the original garden that flowed around land of precious stones and metals (gold, bdellium, onyx [2:12]) and so here we have similar allusions but this time to Ezekiel 47:12 where water flows from the temple. Here it does from God and the Lamb who are the true temple.

Water is a metaphor for God's abundant supply of our needs; this spiritual water is in constant supply in the "center" of the "city" sustaining the greatest of all needs, fellowship and intimacy with God.

The water is described as "clear as crystal" implies purity and holiness flowing from the presence of God, the throne or rule of God.

(2) The tree(s) of life, v. 2b

In the original creation there was a single tree designated as the tree of life (Gen 2:17). In Gen 3:22, 24 Adam was prevented from enjoying the tree, and an angel guarded the garden from his intrusion lest he lived forever in his cursed condition. Here there are trees on both sides of the river signifying abundance. See also Rev 2:7. The tree of life has become an orchard of many trees of the same kind, and access is continual.

A logical question emerges in this verse: if the purpose of eating from the tree is healing, and we are transported to an absolutely holy environment, safe from any intrusions to the contrary, what is John saying? This is a quotation from Ezekiel 47:12; in the context of the passage, which deals with the safety and security of God's people from any harm forever, it seems best read as a metaphor expressing abundance of life without threat. That is, God's supply of grace and mercy because of Christ's death has no end. *Remember, John is using earthly realities to explain heavenly realities; he is stating things from his sphere of existence to explain the incomprehensibility of life in the presence of God. The issue is the picture, not the details.*

(3) The city of life, vv. 3-5

What we have here are further details of what John has disclosed in the previous verses. It is very much a

repetition of 21:22-23.

(a) Life without the separation, vv. 3-4

The judgment of death (Gen. 2:17), separation from God, is abolished; the habitation of God is restored to a race now cleansed, Jews and Gentiles. The angel guards us safely within, not to keep us out!

The throne of God is one, the occupants are two, but the saints will serve (worship one [Him]). Here is deity enthroned in singularity and multiplicity, the Godhead.

The negative, the curse with its removal, is positively explained. The saints of God, cleansed and blameless, shall stand in the presence of God (Matt 5:8), the cause of the separation having been removed finally. Further, the intimacy of communion with God is enhanced with the notion that His name will be on our “foreheads (inscription of names was often for identification of ownership).”

(b) Life without darkness, v. 5

No longer will there be the threat of stumbling; life's shadows having been removed from us. A greater light will have dispersed the darkness, the light of God's presence!

The “reign” of the saints with God here is distinguished from that of 20:1-6 because it is without end. Rev 20:1-6 ended with a final satanic rebellion; this one will have no end! Saints will rule with Christ in the new creation, the new city, in a shadowed fashion like God's instruction to Adam in the original creation to rule “over every living thing that moves on the earth (Gen 1:28).”

IV. Epilogue, 22:6-21

The final section of the book is closely connected to the introduction (1:1-8), functioning as bookends on an allegorical book shelf. The function of the chapters between is to explain the basis for the moral exhortation contained in the book.

Both indicate that they are divine communications (1:1, 22:6).

Both indicate that John received the communication (1:1, 22:8).

Both indicate that the content of the book is prophecy, “what must soon take place” (1:1, 3; 22:6, 10, 20).

Both denominate Christians as God’s bondservants (1:1, 22:9).

The introduction promises blessing for obedience while the conclusion promises cursing for disobedience (1:3, 22:18-19)

When you read this final section, it is a grand invitation to the troubled seven churches, the most immediate audience, and saints thereafter and through the centuries. The essence of the final plea is to remain faithful to the Lord, turn from the compromise described by the failures of several of the churches, and trust the Lord that He will keep His promises of security, safety, and protection. While living for Christ has its temporal dangers and privations of various sorts, Jesus invites them, and us, to remain true to Him. In this paragraph are various comforts, warnings, and consolations.

Names of God and descriptions of Him should be a comforting focus (vv. 6, 13, 16, 20, 21).

There are reminders that God will honor His faithful people (vv. 7, 9, 12, 14).

There is the command to come to Him to walk in His ways (vv. 17, 20).

There are warnings to the derelict, those not obeying the instructions in the book by neglect or reinterpretation, is a very serious matter (vv. 18-19).

There is the reminder that Jesus will return and deal with His people (vv. 7, 10, 12, 18).

The evidence that there is no advantage in following the lifestyle of those outside the “city,” the world system (vv. 11, 15).

There is the emphasis that what has been written in the book is unquestionably true (vv. 6, 16-18, 20).

The passage is to be read as a positive crescendo, a plea, an invitation to God’s people, those “who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb (v. 14)” to remain true in their witness to Jesus. It is not about the possibility of the loss of life in God; it contains stark language to make a point of emphasis. What we have here is parental instruction! The main point of John’s writing is to exhort believers to a faithful walk with God.

A. The Final Message, vv. 6-19

1. The call to heed the words of the book, vv. 6-9

a. From the angel, vv. 6-7

The call to heed the exhortations and warnings in the book is grounded in the divine sanction of its contents (“faithful and true,” a phrase repeated from 22:5).

The announcing angel connects the revelation of His message with that of the prophets, the OT prophets. It would seem best to translate the verse, in part, this way: “the spirit that inspired the prophets” authorized the message.

The angel makes it evident that the goal of the book is instruction in moral rectitude and spiritual vitality. Instead of moral and spiritual compromise as the ways to manage in a pagan world-system, the way to do so, the blessed way, is to obey the book. That is the way that

leads to salvation, blessedness. The book closes as it opened (1:3).

b. From John, vv. 8-9

1) His reaction, v. 8

John's reaction was the perception that the angel was the Angel of the Lord, Christ.

2) His instruction, v. 9

Angels are not to be worshipped; they, like the prophets, are mere messengers. The message of the Book, like that of the angels and prophets, being the words of God, are to be obeyed.

2. The reason to heed the words of the book, vv. 10-11

a. The instruction, v. 10

The concept of "sealing" is that of securing so as to preserve; in this case, it has reference to the contents of the book so that its message can be widely disseminated. When Daniel was instructed to do so it was because the content was unintelligible (12:4); such is not the case with John because the "shadows" have dissipated and the "end times" have come. Daniel lacked perspective and instruction as to the meaning of his visions; John did not.

b. The conclusion, v. 11

The background of this verse is John's reading of Dan 12:10. John seems to be saying that the wicked will be as they are and the saints should act in accord with what they have become. This, then, is a warning to the seven churches (v. 16) to pursue holiness, not compromise their morals or convictions, and live the truth.

3. The motives to heed the words of the book, vv. 12- 15

a. The promise, v. 12

The motive for obedience, rather than compromise, is two-fold: first, Jesus is coming quickly (the word denoting immanence) and with Him comes the blessings of His people. The term "quickly" does not indicate the lapse of time before His coming so much as that it could be any time.

The “reward” in the coming of the Lord is the bestowing of final redemption upon His people. The idea is not that the reward is a matter of earning; it is a matter of gracious bestowing. The point is “when” the reward of a final salvation is granted, not the means of its being bestowed. While salvation is a free, unmerited gift of God, it is life-transforming. The transformed life is the evidence of life, not the cause of life, and that is rewarded.

b. The certainty, v. 13

Three titles of Jesus are found here; they function to give assurance that He will fulfill the promise of reward.

“Alpha...Omega” emphasizes Jesus’ eternality and sovereignty.

“First...Last” emphasizes that He is the cause and goal of history.

“Beginning...End” emphasizes that He finishes what He starts.

c. The blessing, v. 14

Because Christ is the sovereign over the events of history, clearly stated in the previous verse, those who have washed their garments in the blood of the Christ have the right and privilege of entering into His presence.

This is the last of seven blessing-statements in the book (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). Those who “was, meaning those who believe in Jesus, will have access to life in the Kingdom of God, the new creation.

“Wash their robes” contextually seems to refer more to the manner of living the Christian life than entering into it. The tense of the verb, being present, looks at continual action. Likely it means living lives obedient and dependent on the Lord.

d. The warning, v. 15

Those barred from the city are also found in 21:8, 27. Five of the descriptors are from 21:8 and one from 21:27; both lists mention liars. An item not found in either list is “dogs.” The list not only designates false professors of the

faith, but also those who have strayed from the churches. Those who “loves and practices lying” denotes willful deception.

“Dogs” is a metaphor for a characteristic observable in them, self-interest, and also of unbelievers (Matt 7:6). Paul applies the term to those who profess faith but are idolatrous (Phil 3:2-3, 18-19), Peter to false teachers and mere professor (II Pet 2:1-3, 13-14, 16).

“Outside” in this book, outside the city, would be the Lake of Fire.

4. The authentication of the words of the book, v. 16

The words “I, Jesus” only occur here in the New Testament. The “you” in this verse is plural and the referent is the seven churches.

Jesus’ confession of being the source and a son of David (“root” and “offspring”) is prophetic. He seems to be saying that the promises made to David are fulfilled in His kingship are fulfilled in him as his greater son (Isa 11:1).

A “bright morning star” heralds the advent or dawning of a new day. Jesus, David’s greater son and the one through whom the promises are fulfilled, is the harbinger of a new day. As David established Jerusalem as his capitol, his greater son founded the New Jerusalem, a “city” that will never be conquered by “Babylon,” the world’s values. A root is largely unseen, but a star is visible to everyone!

5. The Invitation to heed the words of the book, v. 17

The Spirit is most likely the Holy Spirit and the bride, the entire church (you can read it as the Spirit speaking through the church [church meaning God’s people]). Not all in the church can urge struggling believers, but those who walk with the Lord in obedience (unlike some in the churches of Asia Minor). The imperative, “come,” is addressed to believers (“let the one...”) for who else could hear, perceive need, or desire.

The invitation is addressed to Christians in the seven churches, and those of the centuries who might find the compromising pressure of the world system too much to resist. This would be consistent with the thrust of the book that concerns issues of Christian dereliction in the churches and the culture. The “water of life” being the refreshment that comes through obedience.

6. The warning to those who would destroy the book, vv. 18-19
If the above mentioned is valid (that Revelation was written to derelict churches to order to encourage and exhort them to reverse their path by helping them lift their eyes about temporal issues to see life from the perspective of eternity, the triumphal reign of Christ with His people in a new garden, city, the New Jerusalem), the exhortations here are to professing Christians. Just as the warnings of Deuteronomy (29:20) were addressed to the ancient people of God, so these are addressed to the new people of God. Just as there were unbelievers among the ancient people of God (evidenced by the Golden calf episode, the rebellion of Korah, the foolishness of Baal Peor), so there are in the churches of every era. The warnings are to the professing church.

Dereliction gives birth to dire consequences. However, the major interpretative issue in v. 19 is the matter of removal from the “tree of life and from the holy city.” Does this mean that salvation can be lost? If valid, a contradiction emerges because of the statement in 3:5 (“He who overcomes... I will not erase from the book of life...”). Clearly, the warning is addressed to professing believers. However, are they? The mark of true conversion, the presence of the life of God, is perseverance of profession characterized by obedience. “He who overcomes” means those who in spite of pain and suffering refuse to find their rest in anyone or anything others than Jesus Christ. By adding or subtracting from the truths found in the book, John means this: to distort its message so as to justify the need not to obey it reveals an

unbeliever's heart, lostness. John sees disobedience as a possible evidence of lostness!

Another way to read these verses is to emphasize the "if anyone" statements. They are third class conditions in the language of the writer. This means that John is expressing a hypothetical possibility that may or not be true. It is a hyperbolic statement, a literary device, employed to state a point. In this way of reading, John would be emphasizing the foolishness of such a moral direction, not the fruit of it.

B. The Final Promise, v. 20a

The promise of Jesus' coming is the basis of His warning in the previous verse to those who would twist the instruction in the book so as to avoid the suffering that might come with obedience to it.

C. The Final Statement, v. 20b

This phrase "Come, Lord Jesus" can be read in two ways: "Our Lord has come" (something like, "He is risen! He is risen indeed!") or "Our Lord, Come." The first is a declaration, the second a prayer.

D. The Final Provision, v. 21

Grace is God's provision for the tormented saint; it is not the mechanizations of the saints to avoid turmoil by distorting and neglecting God's instructions.

Applications

1. The book concludes by telling us that what has been written is trustworthy, true, of course, because it has come from the throne of God through an angel and communicated to John who recorded it. What are the practical implications of this for you and me? First, if true, we are to believe it. Second, if true, we are to act responsibility in light of it. That is, we are to resist the temptation of cultural and moral conformity that stands in antithesis to all that is contrary to it. The message of the book is that we should honor God in thought and behavior because there is a world to come for us where true compassion, love, care, and protection abounds in glorious light

- forever. Third, you and I should be a people of hope basking in a future that is bright and beautiful, coming as soon as the “lesser” shadows pass away. Have you gotten the gist of the book? Do you see the practical nature of the book for every generation of believers?
2. Indirectly the book tells us a little about angels and their function (vv. 8-9). It was not long ago in my memory that Christians seemed to have a fetish for angels. We decorated our homes with them; they seemed to be the “talk of the town.” What does this tell us about ourselves? Does it not say that we find symbols endearing and entertaining, if not comforting? Angels are conduits of intercession; they are not to be objects of adoration. They are created beings that serve God from heaven whereas, for a while, we serve Him from earth. They dwell in the presence of God and someday we shall join them to worship God. They are servants of their creator as we are. However beautiful things may appear, only one appearance, one person, is to be worshipped because only one is supreme. Do you find yourself like John adoring the creature rather than the creator, what we see rather than the one only revealed in Jesus? Do you tend to value the immediate over the eternal? What does this look like for you?
 3. Jesus speaks in this final section about Himself. He tells us who He is and what He will “soon” do (vv. 12, 20). As to His identity He is the creator, controller, and sustainer of history; He is the sovereign Lord (v. 13). Further, He is the ground of the promises to King David that his throne would be an eternal reign (II Sam 7:16) and is that Jesus is the fulfillment of those promises (He is David’s greater son) (v. 16). Finally, He is the metaphorical star that announced the dawn of a new day. Jesus not only announced it; He is that new day, a day, unlike any other day we know, that will not end in darkness but even greater light! Is that not a thrilling, life-reorienting realization? Is it not amazing that in the confusions of our day that seems to be so meaningless that there is a profound unseen story unfolding? It is a story that will not end in disappointment, but the unexplainable delight that this promised one will reign forever and we in His presence to share in His triumph.
 4. Jesus also tells us what He will accomplish when He returns with the complete renovation of the earth, the removal of the blight of brokenness caused by the fall. He will return as judge over those

who have rejected His kingship and reward those who have endured the downside of His identity, the wrath of His enemies (v. 12). How are we to explain the concept of reward when in reality we have nothing to give to God because all that we have to give He has given through talents, gifts, circumstances, and empowerment by his Spirit? If we have nothing to offer to God in ourselves, even redeemed selves, how do you explain rewards, rewards for what? The answer lies in the wonder of Christian faith. We cannot have faith in God's son, because prior to our salvation we simply did not know Him as altogether beautiful and adorable; we knew little but what we did through natural revelation was sufficient to warrant our avoidance of Him. God revealed His son to us so that we could believe (believing requires an object; we have the ability to believe but we used it on worthless objects). He rewarded us with life for something He caused. This is the miraculous nature of our faith. God grants us abilities to serve Him, circumstances to serve Him, empowerment to serve Him (all of which we lack in ourselves by ourselves) and then He rewards us for what He has done. Why? God is gracious and indebted, necessitated to action, by His love for us, not our accomplishments (accomplishments are affects, not causes). Is this not amazing? God will reward us for what He has done! This should keep us from pride in accomplishment, dependent on His generosity, and overwhelmed by His grace in this life and the better one to come.

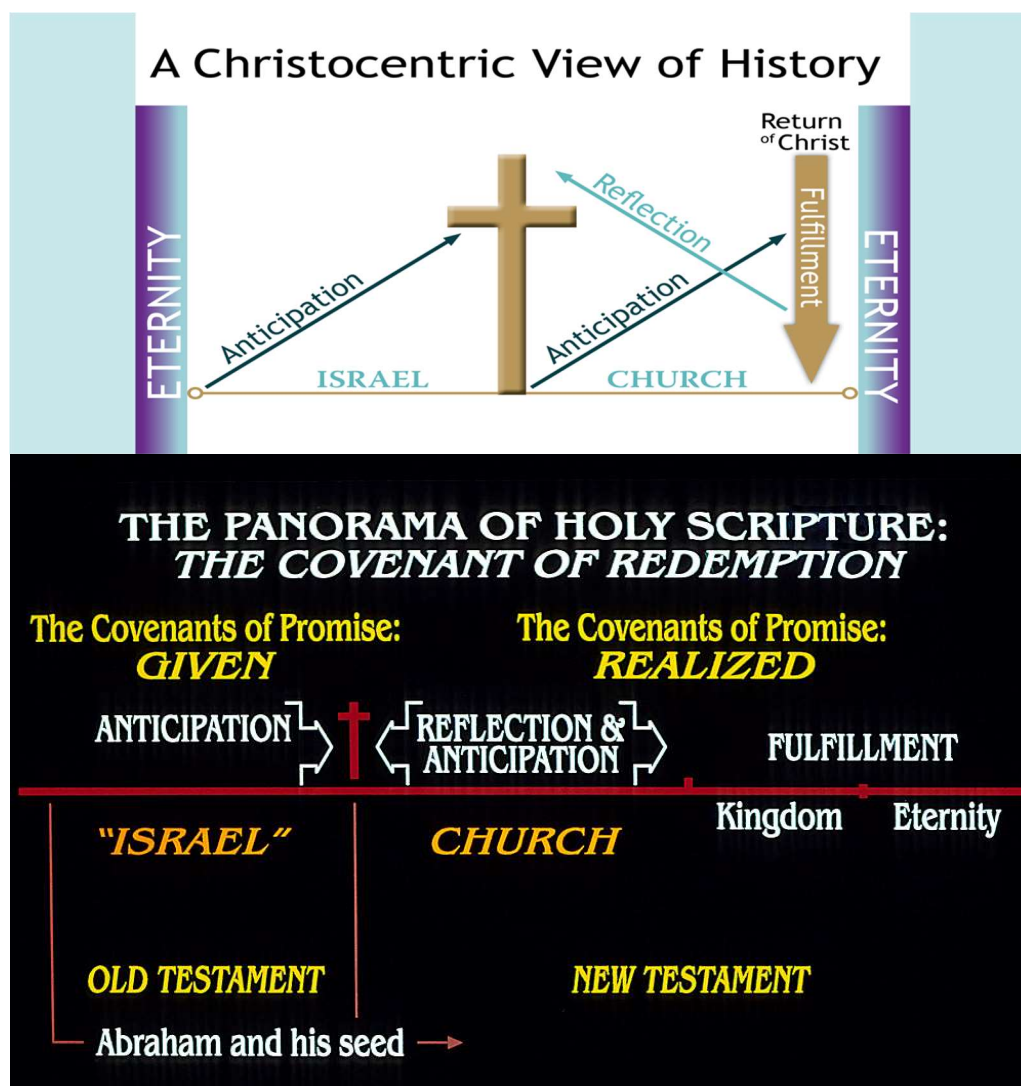
5. The phrase "blessed are those who wash (v. 14)" is worth our pause. It indicates present action, continual action. The term "blessed," which occurs seven times in the book, literally means "one upon whom divine approval rests;" the blessed are the already blessed by God's acceptance. We are people who have been washed; our "garments" have been made clean, the filth of all our wrongdoings before God in the Savior's sacrifice on our behalf. That cleansing is a completed act, but the reference here is to daily cleansing from doings contrary to life in the family of God; it is about family issues of fellowship and honesty, expressive of love for God that is at issue. We have been washed, approved of God because of Christ, but we have not arrived at the sacred "city" yet. We walk in the mire of "Babylon." Jesus is saying to the seven churches and to us that the Christian life is one of seeking daily cleansing from the dust and dirt

of this world that stains our righteous “garments.” Do you wash your clothes when they become soiled? Do you take your better dresses and suits to the dry cleaner when they become stained? You and I need daily, as cleansed people, to return to the cleanser to be cleansed (I John 1:9)? These are the people that God’s approval rests upon, not those who hide their sin in a myriad of excuses. Which type of person are you?

6. The warning in this section is worth a pause also (vv. 18-19). The two “if” clauses require careful observation to grasp John’s subtle distinctions here and avoid confusion. Both “ifs” introduce a probability, not a certain consequence or fact. The consequences in each case are quite different and stark. The first “if” entails a stern warning of consequences. It seems to be written to believers, such as those in the seven churches, who sought safety in compromise and concession to the politico-religious culture for economic and social reasons. They are warned not to do so. The manner in which they have done so is not by denying the truth of God’s word, but in altering it to justify their behavior (this is expressed in willful disobedience to it, intentionally ignoring it, twisting its meaning, and diluting its actual meaning). The warning seems to be that of Hebrews 12:3-17, the two books having similar purposes. The second “if” statement aims at mere professors who think they know God because they are in the assembly of the saints in those cities. This charge seems to be that of total neglect of the truthfulness of John’s words; these are unbelievers. They think they are in the book because of church association, but it will someday be known that these types in our churches today are not in the “Book of Life.” Do you take the Bible with seriousness or do you shade its relevance when it proves troublesome to your wants and desires?
7. The final verse in the text speaks of the greatest need that we all have, grace. Not just any kindness or benevolence, but the magnitude of grace that flows from the Lord Jesus, from Calvary through the resurrection evidencing the triumph of the king, hope to us, and final victory for all. People can be gracious, and that is as it should be, but the kindness of people is incomparable to that of the Lord God of heaven. The seven churches needed this endless mercy to walk carefully, wisely in a troubled and troublesome culture and so do you and I. Do you ask God for His grace in your family, social

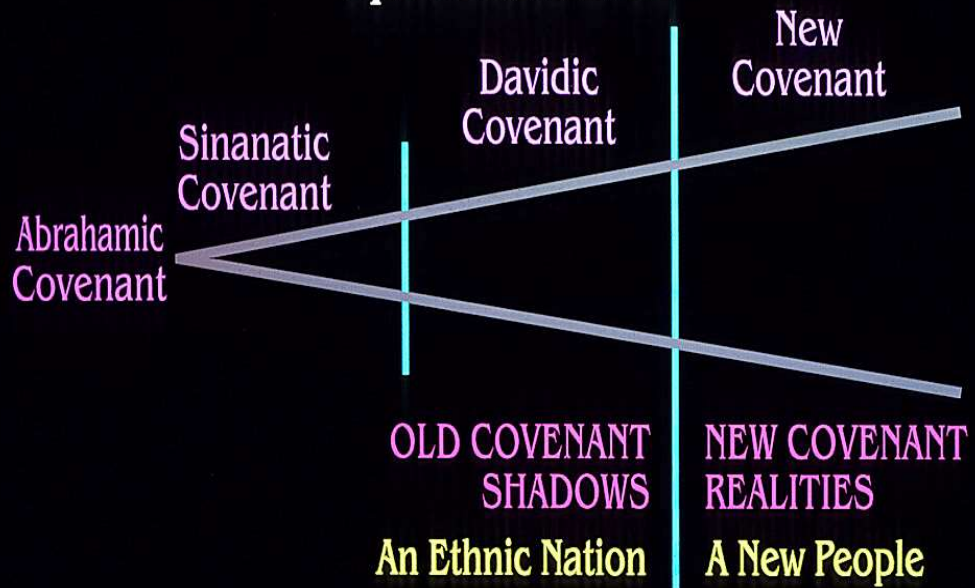
relationships, the management of choices in a broken world? The book begins with the words “the revelation of Jesus Christ (v. 1)” and it ends with “the grace of the Lord Jesus” (v. 21). One is a fact, the other a prayer. Is it your prayer that through the disclosure of Himself to you, you would understand in a deeper sense the grace that comes through it?

I was asked, after class last week, to make available the power points I used, a pictorial summary Bible. They are below.



THE COVENANTS OF PROMISE

Ephesians 2:12



The Meaning of Universal History: God's Glory Revealed, Redemption Accomplished

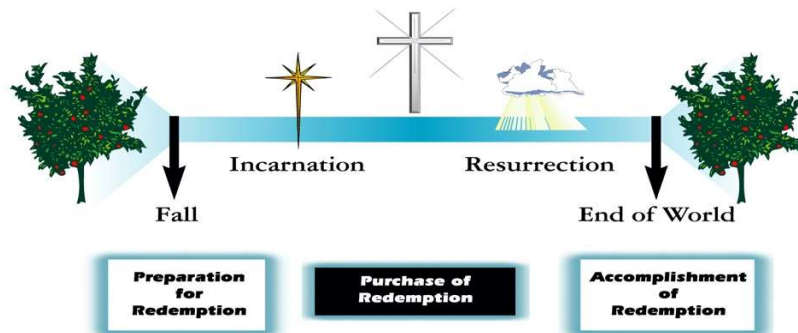


Chart 2