

The Glory of God is Its Light

May 9, 2021 Scott Gunn

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. — Revelation 21:23

The Revelation to John certainly makes a splashy conclusion to the Bible. Hollywood loves it, and so do the writers of tawdry novels about the end times. It's easy to see why. The poetic imagery is breathtaking, and the layers of symbolism are legion. It's dazzling.

Too many people mis-read Revelation. We're accustomed to reading facts, and most of us are more adept at soaking up prose than poetry. We forget that the Bible is a library, and like a public library with many sections for different kinds of books, the Bible has its own divisions and kinds of books. If I went to the history section of the library looking for song lyrics, I'd probably be frustrated. And if I went to the poetry section looking to understand the facts behind historical events, I might be discouraged.

Some of the Bible is written as history. Some of it is written as poetry. We must enter each section knowing what kind of book we are reading. The problem for many readers of Revelation is that we don't understand that much of it is a kind of writing called "apocalypse." Revelation also has bits that are written as a letter, and other bits that are prophetic. We can't read it as history, and it's not really poetry, either.

Revelation offers a God-given vision. It wouldn't be wrong to read it as a divine dream. This vision is about the final days of history. What will those days bring? Who will benefit? Who will suffer? What will we see of God?

This strange book wasn't written to offer comfort to already-comfortable people. The book was likely written—or perhaps I should say, God gave Saint John the vision—to comfort Christians who were being persecuted at the hands of the forces of empire. Revelation was surely written for those at the margins, not those in the seats of power. Reading it with this knowledge starts to change our view of it.

Here's a spoiler alert for the end of time. It's going to be good. All of the evils of the age will be redeemed, and goodness and love will fill the universe. No, the Lamb of God will not literally become a lamp. But the Lamb of God will radiantly bear God's glory for all to see.

Imagine a world with no suffering. Imagine a world where injustice has been made right. Imagine a world where love finally triumphs over every evil.

Easter gives us a glimpse of this world, but Revelation tells us that one day this amazing world will be the reality. At the end, love wins. In a big way.