

Heaven will be paradise, shared with God and his worshiping people who remain faithful to God's Word and hold fast to God's promise to come and repay the righteous and unrighteous for their deeds. The Bible closes with a vision calling us to believe, hope, trust, and wait for God to fulfill his promise.

Introduction - "I will fight no more forever." Story of Chief Joseph, the leader of the Nez Perce tribe.

I. Starting at the End of Promise

A. A vision of heaven (vv. 1-5)

John has a heavenly vision of the creation curse removed, where the river of living water, the tree of life, and all God's servants worship in the light of God's glory. Nothing will be accursed. In his light, God's people will serve forever as priestly kings over the new heaven and earth.

B. A promise from God (vv. 6-17)

Jesus promises he is coming soon and will bring his recompense to the righteous and unrighteous. The unrighteous will harden in their character and deeds. The righteous will be strengthened in who they are and what they do. But Jesus who sees all from beginning to end will balance the scales of justice and repay every person for what he has done.

C. A warning and charge (vv. 18-21)

Don't change the words of Revelation. If you do, you will fall victim to all the terrible plagues described in this book. Instead, believe and keep God's promises until Jesus comes. Long for his return. Wait patiently. Be long-suffering. Live obediently by his grace until the end.

II. What is the Story of Promise?

A. Act One: Creation

The world was once a paradise. God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to exercise dominion over it. God assigned them duties of cultivation, guardianship, and expansive development. So as long as humanity remained faithful to their creation mandate and avoided the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God would live in their presence forever. If Adam proved himself faithful, then God would confirm Adam in righteousness and glorify creation in holiness.

B. Acts Two: Fall

Satan appeared as a serpent and convinced them God's promise was not trustworthy. God decided to display his magnificent grace by making a new promise: to put strife between the serpent and the woman, and between his children and hers. Satan would bruise his heel, but he would crush Satan's head (Genesis 3:15). But until the time of fulfillment, God's people could not have access to God's garden sanctuary and the tree of life. So they had to leave. The history of man outside the garden is full of violence, murder, sexual exploitation, theft, blasphemy, idolatry, and every manifestation of falsehood.

C. Acts Three: Israel

But God did act upon his ancient promise to save the world. His plan was to choose the children in the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel to be a holy people who would show the world how awesome life in the Garden of Eden was supposed to have been, and will be someday. The best part of the plan was that God would dwell in his new garden land with his people Israel. But like Adam and Eve, the nation chose to pursue its own vision of paradise rather than trust God's promise. For centuries God send his servants the prophets to Israel, each calling the people to believe God's promise. When it became obvious that Israel had become hardened in her rejection of God's promise and reached the point of no return, God exiled his people away from his presence in the garden land.

D. Acts Four: Jesus & the Church

With the arrival of Jesus, the Son of God came to dwell with his people. As the seed of the woman, Jesus suffered Satan's bite when he died on the cross, but Jesus crushed the serpent's head when he rose from the dead. And as the King of kings, Jesus appointed his cleansed servants to reign with him over all the earth. As he reigns from heaven, his servants testify to the truth that Jesus is steadily fulfilling God's promise to save the world. Until the day when paradise is regained, the Church exists to believe the promise, testify to the promise, and live faithfully to the promise.

E. Acts Five: New Creation

Someday the story of promise will end happily ever after. Jesus will return to earth and finish God's promised plan to save the world. He will be their God in Christ, and they will be his people in Christ.

III. Why the Story of Promise?

A. To reveal what heaven will be like (vv. 1-5)

The Church's future hope is worshiping God in heaven where the curse is no more and life springs eternal. The image of a garden-city awakens our hope for paradise restored: unbroken fellowship with God and people. Such imagery in Revelation's promises to comfort the believer during times of persecution, trial, and suffering. Heaven is the promise of a homeland.

B. To describe who will enter heaven (vv. 6-17)

Only those who worship God alone will enter heaven. If John could fall into false worship, there must be a subtle danger of even faithful Christians falling into idolatry. A Christian is one who admits he has filthy clothes stained with sin. He knows there is no way to be righteous and holy unless he washes his sin away with the blood of Jesus. Verse 11 says patterns of behavior, whether guided by unbelief or faith, eventually become "set in stone" or irreversible. Regarding the unrighteous, when the evildoer and filthy hear the message of Revelation and refuse to repent, their hearts are hardened. But when the righteous and holy hear Revelation, their hearts are shaped by its promises.

C. To instruct how to enter heaven (vv. 18-21)

First get your doctrine of the Bible right. Do not alter God's Word in any way, but believe his promises and keep his Word until Jesus comes. If you add or subtract from the Bible, you won't be in a position of submission to God. You'll think the Bible needs to be cleansed rather than you! Only those who believe all of God's Word are in a position to be washed in Christ's cleansing blood, and thereby made holy, and therefore to do right. Only those will enter heaven.

Conclusion – Note this last chapter of Revelation (and of the entire Bible) draws together many of the macro themes addressed earlier in Revelation. Creation, Fall, Love, Sacrifice. All these major themes find their fulfillment in God's Story of Promise in which he finishes his work of creation, redemption, and consummation. Is it worth all the sacrifice and trouble and energy and scorn and heartache and suffering to believe and trust the Story of Promise? God's answer in Revelation, where we marvel at the ending of all God's Stories, is Yes (2 Corinthians 1:20)!