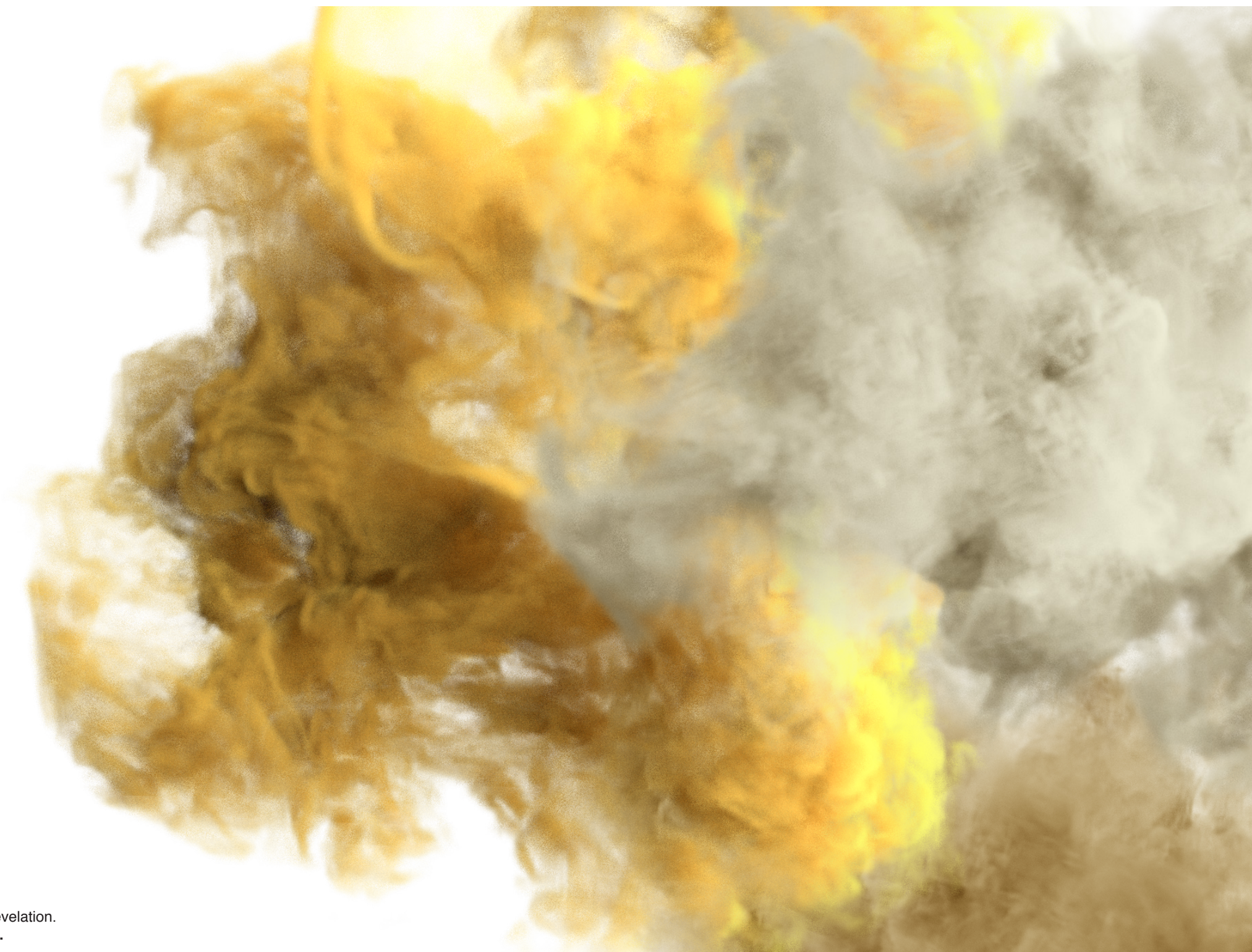


# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION

**BY: PASTOR JUSTIN DEAN**





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This introduction was written by Justin Dean to accompany the sermon series on the book of Revelation.  
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# Introduction

I have no recollection of ever reading a book before I was converted to Christ at the age of 17. But upon my conversion, I became a voracious reader. The first book that I can remember reading was “Left Behind” by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. This book was the first in a series on the end of the world and the book of Revelation that has sold over 80 million copies and has been made into three less-than-stellar movies starring the likes of Kirk Cameron and Nicolas Cage. A concerning issue for people who take their Bible seriously is that even though the Left Behind series is a work of fiction, it has profoundly shaped the majority of Americans’ views regarding the interpretation of the book of Revelation.

But is it correct?

On top of that, you have a plethora of people who claim to be “prophets” who write books, host websites, and gain popularity on television by claiming to be able to connect the events of today’s news cycle with Scriptures from the book of Revelation all predicting that Jesus is coming back, that the Antichrist is here, and the BEAST is on the prowl. I don’t think there is a more misinterpreted or misunderstood book in all of the Bible. Those of you who have read through the book of Revelation know how confusing it can be. What’s with all of these crazy creatures, lamp stands, trumpets, plagues, and bowls? And yet, it is also a beautiful book

A book full of images of an exalted Jesus and full of scenes that depict His glory in ways that both terrify us and reclaim our wonder at the same time.

This book is meant to turn our lackluster praise of God into a white-hot crescendo that fills us with a hope that cannot be shaken. This is why we are going to spend several months carefully working through the book in our Sunday gatherings at Sacred City. But I will not be able to say all that I want to say about this great book. In fact, I may just be scratching the surface. It is for that purpose that I am writing this short introduction to the book of Revelation. It is my hope that this will serve to give you some background information on the book and will also work as a tool in your hands to aid your own Bible study.

I want you to be able to read this book and understand how it points to the glory of God and is a fitting conclusion to the Story of God and His Kingdom.



# Interpretation Issues

Interpretation, or hermeneutics as it is often called, "...is the process of determining how the ancient biblical text has general relevance here and now..."<sup>1</sup> This is a process that can seem more than a little daunting when it comes to Revelation and has caused many people to think that studying this book is "above their pay grade." I don't think it is. I just think we need a little training in how to interpret this book. First, to the person who has no idea how to interpret the strange visions and multi-headed beasts, and therefore tries to avoid this book as much as possible, let me ask you a question. Do you believe that God would have given us this book if it wasn't intended to have real impact in our everyday lives? In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 Paul tells us that, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." That means the book of Revelation has practical implications for your life; it is meant to "train you in righteousness" and "equip you for every good work." It isn't just about predicting the future. Second, to the person who takes an unhealthy obsession with this book and claims to know what every single detail means and how it points to something that just came up in their news feed and they have the chart to prove it: Do you think this book would be easier to understand in the 21st century or in the first-century? Would God really give His first-century church a book that would have very little to do with them because it was primarily meant to speak to us today?

## THESE QUESTIONS ARE LEADING US TO THE TWO MAIN PRINCIPLES WE MUST USE WHEN WE ARE INTERPRETING ANY SECTION OF SCRIPTURE.

# 1

### **The Bible is written for us, but not to us.**

This book was written to a first-century audience in a way that a first-century reader would understand. Therefore, we must first work to understand the historical and literary context in which this book was written before we try to apply it to our lives. This principle teaches us that the book of Revelation cannot mean something now, that it didn't mean then. We will apply this principle in this introduction by studying the genre, date and place of writing, and how the author meant to use symbols, numbers, Old Testament allusions, and a literary technique of progressive recapitulation to get his point across.

# 2

### **It is all about the gospel.**

The whole Bible is about the gospel of God's Kingdom. Kingdom created in the beginning, Kingdom lost in the garden, Kingdom promised to Abraham, Kingdom foreshadowed to David and Solomon, Kingdom prophesied by the Old Testament Prophets, Kingdom redeemed in Jesus Christ, and Kingdom restored in the book of Revelation. You cannot understand the message of the Bible if you don't understand the gospel. The same is true for the book of Revelation. This book is not meant to be treated in isolation, it is meant to be the final chapter in God's gospel story. Therefore, all of the spectacular visions of Revelation must be read through the lens of the gospel. Keeping this in mind will help us as we read and interpret the book. We must constantly remind ourselves to keep the main thing the main thing: God wins and Jesus reigns in a Kingdom restored. Revelation is all about the gospel.

<sup>1</sup>Goldsworthy, Graeme. Gospel and Kingdom. Paternoster Press, 2012. p.123



# Genre

Most of us probably don't spend much time thinking about genre. And yet, it is one of the keys to being able to interpret and understand anything that we are reading or hearing. Any time we are reading an ancient document like the Bible that has literary genres that are unfamiliar to us, we need to first stop and ask ourselves, "What genre is this?" Each genre has its own set of rules. We interpret an Old Testament narrative differently than we do a New Testament epistle. When we read Psalm 98:7-8 ("Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth."), this is a poetic depiction of all the earth praising God as He restores His kingdom on the earth. It is not to be interpreted in a literalistic fashion as if the mountains will grow mouths and the rivers sprout hands to clap with.

However, Revelation blends three different genres: **prophecy**, **apocalypse**, and **epistle**. In 1:3, we are told, "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this **prophecy**," meaning this book had to do with events that would take place in the future for the first-century audience.

But this book wasn't just meant to tell the future, it is also an **apocalypse**. The Greek word "apocalypse" is translated as "revelation" in Revelation 1:1 and refers to a genre of literature that was popular in the first-century but is extinct today. Apocalyptic literature is usually story-formed and image-laden, and it typically has a heavenly messenger (i.e. Angel) communicating a message of salvation to an earthly person. This message usually includes the judgment of this present evil world which is without hope unless someone from outside this world enters in and fixes things. This issue is usually the spiritual battle between good and evil with the LORD cleaning house through catastrophic events and setting up His eternal Kingdom where everything will be peaceful and good forever. This genre is found in places such as Daniel (especially chapters 7-12), Isaiah 24-27, and Ezekiel 38-39. They are full of visions of the future that contain all kinds of images, symbols, colors, animals, and the symbolic use of numbers.

Revelation is also an **epistle**, a letter written to seven specific churches that were in Asia Minor in the first-century. The main purpose for an epistle in the New Testament is to address problems that have arisen in various churches. That means the book of Revelation was meant to have immediate and practical applications to the lives of its recipients. It was not meant to be only a future-oriented prophecy.

Therefore, Revelation is "'a prophecy cast in an apocalyptic mold and written down in a letter form' in order to motivate the audience to change their behavior in light of the transcendent reality of the book's message."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Beale, G.K. The Book of Revelation, New International Greek Testament Commentary. William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999.



# Date and Place of Writing

Revelation was most likely written by the Apostle John during the reign of Domitian around 95 A.D. A minority of commentators have dated it prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The early date could be right but the bulk of the evidence points toward the latter date as the early church father Irenaeus (c. 115 – c. 202 AD) testified, “The Revelation... was seen not very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign.”<sup>3</sup> John had been banished to the Island of Patmos (think Alcatraz here) and banishment was a common form of persecution for Christians during Domitian’s reign for refusing to worship the emperor. But let us not forget that God is the primary source for this book. Revelation 1:1 says, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” was given “by God...” through “his angel...to his servant John.” Therefore, this book is doing nothing less than taking us up into the mind of God and revealing to us the end for which He has created the world. However, we need to note that the revelation was seen more than it was written; it was a pictorial revelation and not just a word for word transcription. The Holy Spirit told John, “Write what you see in a book...” (1:11). Having this in mind, Pastor Bob Thune writes, “Acknowledging this ‘visionary’ aspect of Revelation will give us some sympathy toward its more mystifying features. After all, if John really saw the Lord Jesus – if he really was ushered into the throne room of heaven to see ‘what must take place after these things’ (Rev. 4:1) – shouldn’t we expect that he’d have a hard time describing what he saw in normal, everyday language? The God upon whom no one can look and live (Ex. 33:20); the God from whom heaven and earth flee away (Rev. 20:11); the God who holds the universe together by his might (Heb. 1:3); the God whom Paul described as speaking ‘inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak’ (2 Cor. 12:4)... would we expect John to describe this God in the same way one describes a tuna fish sandwich? Or might it be fair to assume that John would exhaust the human lexicon looking for words and images to express all that he had seen?”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Irenaeus of Lyons. “Irenæus against Heresies.” The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus. Ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. Vol. 1. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885. 559–560. Print. The Ante-Nicene Fathers





# 5

Revelation is not an easy book to interpret. But that does not mean that its meaning is beyond our comprehension. John uses at least five literary techniques when writing down this revelation that are meant to help us grasp his intended meaning. If we are going to rightly interpret this book then we need to understand these five techniques and how each of them is meant to reveal truth. Let's think of them as five keys to understanding the book of Revelation.

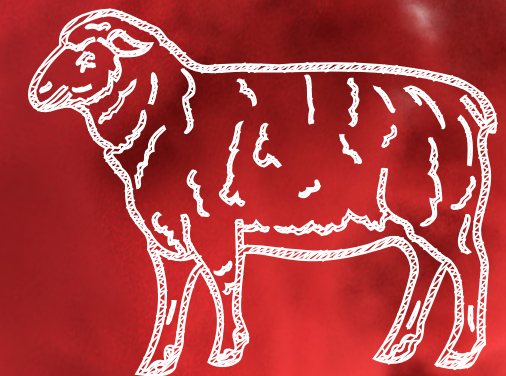
# Keys to Understanding Revelation

## 1. SYMBOLS

"A picture is worth a thousand words" is a common English expression which "refers to the notion that a complex idea can be conveyed with just a single still image or that an image of a subject conveys its meaning or essence more effectively than a description does."<sup>5</sup>

The entire book of Revelation is built around this principle. Revelation is the Instagram of the Bible. It is full of pictures and symbols, it is cinematic content meant to stir our imaginations and move our hearts to worship. But what do we mean when we say that these images are symbolic? We mean that John is painting a picture that is meant to communicate a reality that is present "behind" the symbol. In Revelation Jesus is portrayed as a lamb, a lion, a warrior King with white hair, blazing eyes, a sword for a tongue and a face as bright as the sun. These images are all meant to be symbolic, not to be taken in the most literal sense. Instead, they are meant to communicate to the first-century reader a common meaning that is behind each symbol. When they heard that Jesus was a lamb, they would recall the passover lamb from the Old Testament that was slain to shelter their first-born children from the wrath of God.

Therefore, the more familiar we are with the Old Testament and the context of the first-century readers, the better we will be at understanding the meaning behind the symbols. According to the ESV Study Bible, "The book of Revelation is one of the most sustained examples of symbolic reality in existence."



<sup>4</sup>Thune, Robert H. Revelation: God Wins, An Introduction to the Book of Revelation. Coram Deo Community Church, 2011.  
<sup>5</sup>Wikipedia. "A picture is worth a thousand words," 2018. Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_picture\\_is\\_worth\\_a\\_thousand\\_words](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_picture_is_worth_a_thousand_words)



## 2. NUMBERS

There are a lot of strange numbers throughout the book of Revelation and most of them are some derivative or multiple of 4, 7, 10, 12.

However, these numbers are not meant to be interpreted literally, but again as symbolic. John wants us to see this reality right away when he says, "Grace to you and peace from him who is, who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, and ruler of kings on earth." We see a clear trinitarian structure here with the Father (who is, who was, who is to come), the Holy Spirit (seven spirits), and the Son (Jesus).

But is the Holy Spirit made up of seven spirits?

No, the number seven is a symbol of perfection or completeness as seen in the seven days of creation and the Hebrew notion of the seven day work week. "Other examples of completeness are the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls, which are numbered in order to underscore the completeness of God's worldwide judgment."<sup>6</sup>

Four is also a number that is meant to denote completeness, (think here of the four corners of the earth, East, West, North, and South).

The number twelve is meant to symbolize the idea of unity in diversity while also communicating God's sovereign control over

the world as seen in the twelve tribes of Israel, twelve months in a year, two sets of twelve hours in a day, and Jesus' choice of the twelve apostles.

Therefore, we should not interpret these numbers in a strictly literal manner like some do when they postulate that only 144,000 people will actually be admitted into heaven (from Rev. 7:4 "I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000.") This would be to miss the symbolism in the number. 144,000 is a multiple of 12, and meant to denote the complete number of all of God's people.

This is further proven by looking at verse 9 of the same chapter, where John writes, "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"

John isn't counting people here, he's saying, it was all of God's people, His church was complete. Therefore, we cannot insist on a literal interpretation of the numbers in the book of Revelation. They may be literal, but they are first meant to function symbolically. This will play an important role when we get to difficult issues such as the one thousand year "millennium" reign of Christ and the three and a half year tribulation period.

## 3. OLD TESTAMENT CONNECTIONS

The book of Revelation uses Old Testament imagery and allusions more than any other book of the New Testament. You cannot understand what's going on if you don't have a good working knowledge of the Old Testament. To jump into this book without that Old Testament knowledge, is akin to watching the last season of your favorite Netflix show without watching the first seven seasons. You might enjoy it a little bit, but the majority of its nuance will be lost on you. The same is true of John's Revelation: this is the last chapter in God's unfolding drama of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration and will become increasingly meaningful to you as you gain a better familiarity with the Old Testament.

## 4. PROGRESSIVE RECAPITULATION

I bet those are words you haven't heard put together before. It's another way of saying that the book of Revelation is not a depiction of events in chronological order. Rather, it is a series of scenes that are meant to build on top of one another, a layering effect that is meant to build up to a crescendo. When you are reading Revelation, you will quickly begin to notice that God just keeps destroying the earth over and over again. This should cause us to ask, "Just how many times can God scorch the earth? How is there even vegetation left to scorch from the last time?" Well, the answer is, this is actually the same scene as the last time but John is adding some layers to it. God's judgment is gaining speed here and getting a little more intense than the last time. And this appears to happen at least five times until the book reaches its "glorious climax."<sup>7</sup> Let's take a look at some of the biblical evidence that this is actually what's going on.

<sup>6</sup>Beale, G.K. The Book of Revelation, New International Greek Testament Commentary. William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. p.59.

<sup>7</sup>Hendriksen, William. More than Conquerors: an Interpretation of the Book of Revelation. Baker Books, 2015. p.44



Rev. 6:12-17

12 When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. 14 The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. 15 Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

Rev. 11:15-19

15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." 16 And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. 18 The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth." 19 Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

Rev 16:17-20

17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" 18 And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. 19 The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. 20 And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found.

Rev. 19:19-21

19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. 20 And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. 21 And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

Rev. 20:11-15

11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

In all of these verses you have God's judgment being poured out on the earth in apocalyptic ways and yet each scene gets a little more intense. We should ask ourselves, "Is this God pouring out His wrath on the earth five different times? Or, is this the same scene of God's final judgment portrayed with increasing intensity, and from different perspectives five different times?" The weight of the evidence seems to favor the latter assessment.

The book of Revelation is structured around a cyclical pattern of progressive recapitulation that is meant to draw our attention to the finality of God's judgment and the completeness of His restoration of creation as the climax of the story of Redemption.



## 5. GOD WINS AND JESUS REIGNS

In all of our keys to understanding and interpreting this book this one might be the most important. The theme of this book is that God wins and Jesus reigns over Satan and all of his helpers. The main purpose for which John is writing down this revelation is to encourage Christians to persevere in their faith, no matter what difficult circumstances they are facing because in the end, God wins and Jesus reigns. In Revelation, Jesus conquers "death, Hades, the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, and the men who worship the beast. He is victorious, as a result, so are we, even when we seem to be hopelessly defeated."<sup>8</sup> If we can keep this ultimate victory in mind it will fill us with white-hot worship of Jesus, faith-filled missional zeal for the lost, and confident hope for the future of God's coming Kingdom.





# 5 Major Interpretive

## 1. THE PRETERIST VIEW

The word “preterist” is taken from the Latin word “praeteritum,” meaning “the thing that is past.” The preterist view of Revelation sees the book as a prophecy of things that have already taken place during the early years of the Christian church. Preterists hold that the visions in Revelation refer either to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., or to the demise of the Roman Empire in the fifth century. Most preterists also hold to the early date for Revelation (see above), since the book would have had to be written before 70 A.D. The weakness of this position is that it makes the supposed fulfillment of this prophecy less climactic than the revelation of the prophecy itself. The book is full of end of the world images that seem to suggest a judgment far more extensive than the ones that were witnessed in 70 A.D. or at the demise of the Roman Empire.

## 2. THE HISTORICIST VIEW

The historicist view sees Revelation as a prophecy of successive historical events that span the entire era from the apostolic age to the return of Christ. "Typically this view identifies... the invasions of the Christianized Roman empire by the Goths and the Muslims... the corruptions of the medieval papacy, the reign of Charlemagne, the Protestant Reformation, and the destruction wrought by Napoleon and Hitler"<sup>9</sup> as fulfillments of Revelation’s prophecies. A key critique of the historicist approach is that it “tries to identify historical movements too specifically and limits the prophecies of the Apocalypse to Western church history, leaving aside the worldwide church.”<sup>10</sup>

## 3. THE FUTURIST VIEW

Futurists believe that the book of Revelation is referring to events that are still to come sometime in the future. This is the viewpoint of the Left Behind book series and of much of what you find on Christian television trying to tie current events into evidences for an immanent return of Christ. This is a rather recent viewpoint having existed only for the past 150 years or so. The greatest weakness of the futurist view is that it makes most of Revelation irrelevant to its original audience.

## 4. THE IDEALIST VIEW

“The idealist approach affirms that Revelation is a symbolic portrayal of the conflict between good and evil, between the forces of God and of Satan”<sup>11</sup> and yet it does not believe that Revelation offers a final judgment and consummation of history where God will make all things new and conquer evil. “This position has the opposite problem as that facing the preterists and historicist views, since it identifies none of the book’s symbols with particular historical events.”<sup>12</sup>

## 5. THE ECLECTICIST VIEW

Many scholars in the last few decades have begun to combine some of each of these views above to “allow the preterist, idealist, and futurist methods to interact in such a way that the strengths are maximized and the weaknesses minimized.”<sup>13</sup> That is to say that each view offers something to the reader that helps them interpret the book, but alone each has their own issues. “The preterists and historicists are certainly correct in identifying specific historical events as fulfillments of Revelation’s prophecies – as the Apostle John says, ‘Many Antichrists have come’ (1 John 2:18). And the futurists are correct as well: some events depicted in Revelation (the return of Christ, final judgment, etc.) are still to come. Meanwhile, the idealist interpretation seems to be the most faithful to the literary aspects of the book (symbolism, recapitulation, etc.), and it sees Revelation as

applying to all times, cultures, and situations – not just the first century (like preterism) or the tribulation (like dispensational futurism).”<sup>14</sup> As we preach through Revelation in our Sunday gatherings at Sacred City we are going to approach the book through this eclectic perspective.

<sup>9</sup>Beale, G.K. The Book of Revelation, New International Greek Testament Commentary. William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. p.46  
<sup>10</sup>Beale, G.K. The Book of Revelation, New International Greek Testament Commentary. William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. p.46

<sup>11</sup>Beale, G.K. The Book of Revelation, New International Greek Testament Commentary. William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. p.48  
<sup>12</sup>Beale, G.K. The Book of Revelation, New International Greek Testament Commentary. William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. p.48  
<sup>13</sup>Osborne, Grant R. Revelation, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Baker Publishing Group, 2002. p.21  
<sup>14</sup>Thune, Robert H. Revelation: God Wins, An Introduction to the Book of Revelation. Coram Deo Community Church, 2011. p.10



...  
answering  
three common  
questions



## 1. WHAT IS THE RAPTURE?

It is telling that no matter your church background you have probably heard of “the rapture.” This goes to show the impact pretribulational dispensationalism (say that three times fast) has had on the imaginations of those in our American culture.

Pretribulational dispensationalism teaches that there will be a two-fold coming of Christ, with a seven year interval of tribulation in between. The first coming of Christ is called the rapture, where Jesus removes all of the Christians off of this planet and allows Satan to do his thing unhindered on the earth for the next seven years. Then in a glorious second phase of His return, Jesus will come back and set up His millennial kingdom and rid the world of evil.

Here’s the problem with this view: there is “no sound Scriptural basis for the position that the Second Coming of Christ must be divided into these two phases.”<sup>15</sup> Not only is the evidence for a two-stage return of Christ lacking in Scripture, the evidence for a pretribulational rapture is also absent.

Scholar Anthony Hoekema states, “There is no Scriptural basis for the two-phase Second Coming taught by pretribulationists. The second coming of Christ must be thought of as a single event, which occurs after the great tribulation. When Christ returns, there will be a general resurrection, both of believers and unbelievers. After the resurrection, believers who are then still alive shall be transformed and glorified (1 For. 15:51-52). The ‘rapture’ of all believers then takes place. Believers who have been raised, together with living believers who have been transformed, are now caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:16-17). After this meeting in the air, the raptured church continues to be with Christ as he completes his descent to earth.”<sup>16</sup>

## 2. WHAT IS THE MILLENNIUM?

Revelation 20 speaks of Satan being bound “for a thousand years” (Rev 20:2), during which time Christ reigns. Christians disagree on exactly what this thousand-year period refers to. Three main views are prominent:

**1. Premillennialism** believes that Christ will return in glory before (pre-) a thousand-year literal reign of Christ on this earth. During this reign Jesus will kill the Antichrist, bind Satan, limiting his influence and power as Christ and Christians rule visibly over the entire world. This is not to be confused with the renewal of all things. During this time death and sin will still exist. Near the end of this millennium Satan will be unleashed to deceive the nations once again and a final battle between good and evil will commence and climax with Satan being defeated and cast into the lake of fire. Premillennialism is most common among those who hold to a futurist reading of Revelation.

**2. Postmillennialism** believes that the world will experience a great time of cultural, moral, political, and economic blessing as more and more people come to faith in Christ. “According to postmillennialism the present age will gradually merge into the millennial age as an increasingly larger proportion of the world’s inhabitants are converted to Christianity through the preaching of the gospel.”<sup>17</sup> Postmillennialism is most common among those who hold a preterist or historicist view of the book as a whole.

**3. Amillennialism** believes that Revelation 20:1-10 is actually a symbolic representation of the whole church age between Christ’s first and second comings. Satan was bound in Christ’s death and resurrection and the “thousand year” vision of Revelation 20 is symbolic of a long and difficult season where Christians will need to persevere between Christ’s first coming to bind Satan, and His second coming to destroy Satan. Amillennialism is most common among idealist interpreters.

So which view is correct? Honestly, I don’t really know and I don’t think it matters that much. The important thing is that you choose one and then be a jerk about it. That’s a joke, but, unfortunately, it is usually not far from the truth. Personally, I lean towards the Amillennial position but all of them are consistent with historic evangelical orthodoxy and this is an open-handed issue that we do not want to divide over.

<sup>15</sup>Hoekema, Anthony A. Bible and the Future. William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996. p.16

<sup>16</sup>Hoekema, Anthony A. Bible and the Future. William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996. pp.170-171

<sup>17</sup>Hoekema, Anthony A. Bible and the Future. William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996. p.175



### 3. WHO IS THE ANTICHRIST?

The Antichrist or “the man of lawlessness” as he is also called in Revelation is a man who will appear before the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and will cause great suffering and persecution, specifically for Christians, but who will ultimately be destroyed by Jesus. It seems that every generation believes that they can identify this man in their day and age and that should give us pause before doing likewise.

“The ancient Roman emperors Nero and Domitian, both of whom severely persecuted Christians, were thought by many to be the Antichrist. (Many Roman emperors, including these two, claimed deity for themselves and demanded to be worshiped.) In more recent times Adolf Hitler was commonly thought to be the Antichrist, as was Joseph Stalin. On the other hand, many Protestants since the Reformation, especially those who were persecuted by the Catholic Church, have thought that one or another of the popes was the Antichrist. But all of these identifications have proved false, and it is likely that a yet worse “man of lawlessness” will arise on the world scene and bring unparalleled suffering and persecution, only to be destroyed by Jesus when He comes again.”<sup>18</sup>

However, John says, “as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, so now many Antichrists have come” (1 John 2:18), and he speaks of “the spirit of Antichrist,” which, he says, “is in the world already” (1 John 4:3). Therefore, even if these previous persecutors of the church were not the Antichrist, many of them may have been precursors of the final Antichrist.



<sup>18</sup>Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology, An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine. Zondervan, 1994.



# Conclusion,

Obviously, the book of Revelation is not a simple book to read and understand. But the payoff to the reader who puts in the work is tremendous. God Himself promises to bless the reader who reads this book, hears this book, and keeps what is written in it (1:3). It is my prayer as your pastor that you would read this book over and over and let it turn your worship of Jesus white hot.

This is where we are headed, church!

**"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.'" (Rev. 7:9-12).**



**Helpful Resources For Further Study (From the less technical to the more technical)**

- **More than Conquerors by William Hendriksen**
- **The Bible and the Future by Anthony Hoekema**
- **The Book of Revelation (New International Greek Testament Commentary) by G.K.Beale**

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