

A BRIEF STUDY OF REVELATION

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1. Why study the book?

God does not give useless gifts, and Revelation is a gift to God's servants. It is wasteful and ungrateful to neglect the book. The book aims "to show" us something, and thus we should not be blind in our outlook or attitudes. Rev. 1:1 The book requires obedience (we must "Keep" the things written), and hence a life pleasing to God calls for following Revelation just as we must obey the ten commandments. Our service and morality is crippled to the extent we overlook this book. Rev. 1:3; 22:7. Revelation promises a great "blessing" to those who read and heed it. Rev. 1:3; 22:7. All Scripture is *profitable*; for doctrine, reproof, correction, and righteous living. To the extent we ignore Revelation, then, we are not adequately equipped as men of God. 2 Tim. 3:16-17.

2. "But it is so difficult!"

The book is a "revelation" (an unveiling), not an "obscuring" of the truth! God wants the book understood, and so He *provides interpretation* at all of the crucial junctures (e.g., 1:20; 10:1-7; 17:7ff.). Moreover, the book pervasively uses concepts, themes, and language found elsewhere in Scripture. John also uses many literary devices and figures more than once in the book. Thus Scripture can be used to interpret Scripture.

Of course, the book will undoubtedly be troublesome if it is read as though it were something it does not intend to be – just like the TV Guide would be hard to understand as history, or poetry, or instructions for building a boat! It is crucial that we take Revelation in the way it was intended to be approached; we must recognize the kind of literature it aims to be (namely, highly figurative, dramatic, visionary, etc.).

3. Theme: the *triumph* of Christianity over all opposition.

Christ is sovereignly present with His church (Rev. 1; Mt. 28:18, 20). He promises great blessings to those who are victorious in His name (Rev. 203). His kingdom has been established with power; he now rules over all as enthroned at God's right hand (Rev. 1:5,6; 5:5,12; 6:2; 7:11; 10:2; 11:15, 17; 12:5,10; 19:1, 6; etc). Thus He will destroy the apostate city of Jerusalem which persecutes His people (Chap. 4-11) as well as pagan Rome's empire and city (Chap. 13-18). Satan has been toppled from power (chap. 12) and bound (chap. 20); because he cannot deceive the nations, the kingdom of Christ can be extended everywhere (chap. 19) – that is, the Great Commission can be, and will be, successfully completed. The kingdom shall be consummated in splendor and great blessing (chap. 21-22).

Purpose for declaring these things: to encourage and motivate a church in the midst of tribulation and opposition (e.g., Rev. 1:9).

#1,2,3 above parallel John's emphasis in 1 John 2:18-20, 26-27; 4:1-6; 5:1-5—namely, walk in the truth! This truth *can* indeed be known by you. By it you can overcome all that is *antichrist*.

4. Date of the writing: the latter 60's of the first century A.D.

John's persecution on Patmos corresponds to Peter's and Paul's martyrdom in Rome under Nero.

Internal evidence shows that the temple in Jerusalem is still standing (11:1), and the sixth emperor (king) of Rome is presently ruling (17:10). This places the book prior to AD 70, and in the reign of Nero (if we count from Julius Caesar).

5. Time referent for the fulfillment of the main prophecies:

Four basic positions:

1. *Idealist*—the book deals, not with specific historical occasions, but rather with axioms, principles, or “ideals” which govern our lives and which characterize God’s control over history.
2. *Futurist*—the events of the central prophecies pertain to the distant future with reference to John—namely, they are events which will immediately precede the coming of Christ at the end of this present age (or dispensation), as well as events to transpire in the establishment and end of the millennial kingdom.
3. *Historicist*—the events of the book take place successively throughout the span of church history (from John’s day to the end of the age).
4. *Preterist*—the main prophecies of the book pertain to events which were to transpire in the near future or briefly after John’s writing; as such, they are for the most part past tense to us now, having occurred in the days of the ancient church.

The clear internal evidence: Rev. 1:1,3; 22:6,10. The book is *bracketed* by the interpretive declarations: “things shortly to come to pass (be done)” and “the time is at hand.”

This rules out the idealist position, for specific events are going to come to pass. The futurist is eliminated since the main contents of the book are not far in the future but “at hand.” And the historicist is likewise ruled out because his interpretation includes far future events (and everything in between).

Attempts to obvert the force of John’s interpretative words:

1. Some portion of the book’s symbolism is interpreted as referring to the distant future, and then this passage is set against the verses cited above. Problem: this is hermeneutically backwards. We should reason from the clear passages to the unclear (symbolic) passages, not *vice versa*. (e.g., Col. 1:15 and John 1:3).
2. Relativize the temporal significance:
 - a. “one day is *with the Lord* as a thousand years” (2 Pet. 3:8). Problem: in Revelation it is God telling John now long the time will be; He does not say “it will be short *for me*” but that *as the church* experiences time it will be short. There is no need for God to tell John at this point how He experiences time in relation to man’s experience of it. (Plus: premillennialists surely do not take this approach to the “one thousand” of chapter 20!)

- b. "Well, what counts as *short*? That is a relative word." Answer: correct! It is a relative word—relative to the context or background of its use. And in Revelation we read that God will avenge the martyrs of the church "shortly," but the kingdom will be established for a thousand years (20:2,6). Relatively speaking, the kingdom will endure a *long* time, but the historical judgment on Jerusalem and Rome will be shortly to occur. Or, to put it another way, the historical judgments will fall in the early segment of the kingdom's existence (and growth) on earth—precisely what the preterist maintains.
3. "Well, Christ's coming is going to be quick, but you don't take that in the same way (Rev. 22:7,20). So you are inconsistent." Problem: the passages alluded to say that Christ will come *quickly*, not shortly or immediately ("at hand"); when He does return, it will indeed be sudden and quick (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 5:3). Moreover, the New Testament speaks of Christ as "coming" in many senses—including that of historical judgment (e.g., John 14:18; Mt. 24:30; Rev. 2:5; 3:20). So even if "quick" were taken as "soon," we would still need to determine what *kind* of "coming" is being referred to (final or historical). Besides, wouldn't this approach make the Bible to be mistaken? After all, Christ did not (in any ordinary sense) come soon after John's writing.

Therefore, the preterist interpretation has strong initial support from the clearly declared interpretation offered at the opening and close of the book.

1. Outline of the book of Revelation: (see separate sheet)
 - a. explanation:
 - i. The main outline is provided by John in Rev. 1:19 (I, II, III).
 - ii. The third major section obviously begins at Rev. 4:1 (note its language).
 - iii. The division between III.A and III.B is supported by comparing Rev. 10:8, 10-11 with the second section of the book (chap. 13-18), for instance 13:7; 17:15.
 - iv. Just as III.B is foreshadowed in the sixth trumpet of III.A, so also the resultant vision at IIIB3 is foreshadowed at the sixth bowl of III.B2.
 - v. III.C follows upon .B by any natural reading.
 - b. Note the delicate and conscious *balance* between the main sections of part III for instance: foreshadows at sixth trumpet and sixth bowl.
 - i. Same literary device for III.A and III.B (scroll/book), as well as seven-fold content (trumpets/bowls) which is preceded by setting and characters in each section (heavenly throne room and the Lamb/Satan + 144,000), previews of the content (seals/angelic declarations), and preludes of judgment (both taking place at the heavenly temple).
 - ii. III.A.2 and III.B.2 both use a 4 + 3 pattern, and in the latter section of both the same additional ingredients are found (interpretation, foreshadow of next section, elaboration of the fact that judgment is deserved, note of finality at the seventh trumpet/bowl, and final declaration of God's kingdom being established).

- c. Revelation ties in with the prophecy of Daniel (Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the image in four sections). Daniel said that a fifth kingdom—of divine origin—would smash and supplant the fourth kingdom (namely, Rome) and then grow to fill the earth (Dan. 2:34-35, 44). This is precisely what Revelation teaches. The Roman empire (Beast and harlot) will be judged by God and destroyed (chap. 13-18), and after that the kingdom of Christ shall grow to great proportions as all men are conquered by the gospel from Christ's mouth (Rev. 19) and the church rules with its Lord for the interadvental age (Rev. 20:1-6).
2. Interpretation of the main characters of Revelation: see end of outline sheet.
3. This *confirms* both the *preterist* interpretation as well as *postmillennial* eschatology.

Brief Interpretative Guide to Main Points:

The 144,000: "tribes of Israel (7:4), universal in extent (7:9) = the church, the new Israel of God. See Gal. 6:16; Jas. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1. Also Gal. 3:7, 289-29; 1 Pet. 2:9-10 (with its OT background); and Phil 3:3 with Rom. 2:28-29.

1. interpreted as those saved by Christ's blood (7:13-14; cf. 3:3), those redeemed and elect from the earth (14:3b, 5) who follow the Lamb to living waters (cf. John 7) and have him dwell among them (Mt. 18)—Rev. 7;15, 17 with John 10.
2. spiritual virgins (14:4; cf. 2 Cor. 11:2) who have God's name on them (7:3; 14:1; cf. 3:12).

Enemy of first section (Jerusalem): *seals 2,3,4 // Mt. 24:7; seal 5 // Mt. 24:9; seal 6 // Mt. 24:29; Luke 23:27-31 with Lk. 21:23. – Roman invasion of AD 70.

1. army of horsemen dispatched from Euphrates (9:7, 9:15, 16, 17)—Roman invasion.
2. temple is still standing (11:1).
3. city where Christ was crucified (11:9) falls (11:13); the holy city is tread under foot by the Gentiles – 11:2 // Lk. 21:24. Interpretive *effect*: 10:7 with Eph. 5:5-6
4. however, Jewish church (12:13; cf. Rom 1:3; Gal. 4:4,26) escapes according to Christ's instructions (12:14 with Luke 21;20-21).

Beast: empire which rules from across the sea and demands blasphemous worship (13:1-5); the seat of the empire (16:10) is a great city which falls (16:19).

Heads: heads of the empire-emperors of Rome (17:10). Specifically, the 6th is presently ruling in John's day (17:10=Nero, dating from Julius Caesar) and 7th rules only a short while (=Galba, followed Nero for seven months only). Nero persecuted the church 3 ½ years (13:5b, 7), and his name equals 666 (13:18).

Harlot: ="Babylon" (17:5; cf. I Pet. 5:13), meaning Rome—the city set on seven hills (17:_) and ruling over many nations (17:15) and kings of the earth (17:18). See chap. 18 also.

Second beast: arises on the earth (13:11—Asia Minor) as a false prophet (16:13) which makes people worship the emperor upon pain of economic discrimination and death (13:12, 13-14, 16-17). This corresponds exactly to the ancient emperor cult that persecuted the church.

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Ten Kings: provincial rulers who cooperate with Rome and then turn against it (17:12, 16) at a later time and contributing to its downfall.

Satan: attempted to have Christ killed (12:4 with Mt. 2:16). But Satan was cast down from power by Christ's power (esp. of exorcism)—12:9 with Lk. 10:17-18; John 12:31-32 (cf. Heb. 2:14). Knowing his time is limited and set, he persecutes followers of Christ 12:12 with Mt. 8:29 and 1 Pet. 5:8). When Christ first came to earth (20:1 with 3:7) he bound Satan (Matt. 12:28-29) in order that the Great Commission could be accomplished in His resurrection power (Mt. 28:18-20)—Notice that Satan's binding is specified for one particular purpose in Rev. 20:3; a demon can be bound in one respect and still be quite active in the world (for instance, 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). Over Satan's domain Christ set up His new Kingdom (Rev. 20:4-6 with Acts 2:29-36; Col. 1:13; Heb. 12:28; Mt. 16:19; Lk. 11:20; 17:21; etc.).

Thus John was told "things which must shortly be done," for "the time is at hand" (Rev. 1:1,3 and 22:6,10—the bracketing and interpretative context of the book).

THE ESSENCE OF THE THREE MILLENNIAL VIEWS*

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Premillennialism	Amillennialism	Postmillennialism
1. Christ returns <i>prior</i> to the millennium.	1. Christ returns <i>after</i> the millennium.	1. Christ returns <i>after</i> the millennium.
2. Millennium is a period of earthly prosperity for the kingdom of God, bringing righteousness, peace, and prosperity for the world.	2. Millennium is not a semi-golden age on earth but the blessings of the intermediate state or spiritual triumphs of the church.	2. Millennium is a period of growth for the kingdom on earth, with the world gradually convert and of the vindication of the saints in heaven.
3. There is a historical gap between "first resurrection" (physical) at Christ's return and the second resurrection at final judgment of the wicked.	3. Christ's return will synchronize with the general resurrection and general judgment of all men at the very end of the church age.	3. Christ's return will synchronize with the general resurrection and general judgment of all men at the very end of the church age ("second resurrection").
4. Thus the millennium is distinct from the church age, being a future interim period between Christ's return and the final judgment.	4. Thus the millennium pertains to the present age between the first and second comings of Christ.	4. Thus the millennium is the present age between the first and second comings (Christ's kingdom) or the latter day prosperity of that age of Christ's kingdom.
5. The millennial period will see a restored Jewish nation with Christ ruling physically from Jerusalem with military might over the world	5. The millennial period will see a parallel development of good and evil: the world will not be converted by the church (new Israel) or subdued as yet by Christ the King.	5. The millennial period will see the prosperity of the church (new Israel), its growth through the gradual conversion of the nations (by the sword of the Spirit), and its influence in society and cult as Christ subdues all enemies.
6. Old Testament prophecies of kingdom prosperity are literal and fulfilled in this Jewish state separate from the church.	6. OT prophecies of prosperity are taken figuratively for the new heavens and earth or the spiritual condition of the church.	6. OT prophecies of prosperity are taken figuratively or literally (according to context) as pointing to the visible victory of Christ's kingdom on earth between the two advents, climaxing in eternal state.
7. The church's preaching of the gospel throughout the world will be of little avail as the world grows worse and worse, climaxing in the	7. The church's preaching of the gospel will not achieve pervasive success (although the nations – "Gentiles" – will have received it in some	7. The church's preaching of the gospel will disciple the nations over the long range by the power of the Holy Spirit; worldwide conversion will gradually

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tribulation.	measure), and a period of increasing lawlessness in the future will set back even this limited success.	bring a period of extraordinary righteousness and prosperity, to be broken only briefly at the very end of the age by the release of Satan.
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PREMIL: (Church Age) First Resurrection Millennium Second
Resurrection Eternal State Christ's Return Final Judgment

POSTMIL & Church Age = Millennium Christ's Return
AMIL Eternal State General Resurrection & Final Judgment