

**Dear Church**  
**A Study in Revelation**  
**July 16, 2019**

**An Overview and Major Themes of Revelation**

Hopefully, you were here Sunday, as we were introduced to this wonderful letter. As Randy noted, it is a revelation from Jesus and about Jesus, but we realize that the entirety of scriptures is about Jesus.

As we saw Sunday morning, the opening chapter lays the important groundwork to understanding the message of this book. Let's continue to look at a quick overview and identification of the major themes.

**1) The Overcomers (Chapters 2 & 3)**

In these chapters, Jesus Addresses the 7 Churches of Asia Minor. (We will cover these on Sunday mornings) He affirms and challenges his church to be faithful, to endure and yes to be "overcomers".

**2) A Peek into the Heavens (Chapter 4 & 5)**

How fortunate we are to get a glimpse into the very Throne Room of Heaven. We will learn so much, by what we see, the heavenly host, groups that are identified. We'll learn by their responses to earthly events and by seeing a whole lot of believers from all people groups and nations and whole lot beautiful worship with Jesus at the center of it all.

But we also see a scroll, maybe the same scroll that Daniel was told seal up, will now be opened. It will become the instrument of God's judgment to make all things right...we find out only one person can begin that redemptive process!

**3) Scrolls, Trumpets, and Bowls (Chapters 6-16)**

There are different ways of understanding these scrolls, trumpets, and bowls, some wonder if some of these have already occurred. But as we read, we realize that we have seen similar events and tragedies in the history of mankind, but not to the extent of what is described in these pages.

Secondly, understand this is not an angry God that has had enough! There is a reason and purpose behind these being poured out.

#### **4) God's Ultimate Purpose and the Supporting Cast**

As we watch the events unfolding in our reading, God's ultimate purpose for the people on earth is revealed. It will all be wrapped up in this statement; "The nations still did not repent". In all that is happening, he continues to reach out to the people of this world in love and mercy. Now before you get discouraged, it appears that the greatest revival in all of history is also occurring in the worst of circumstances, along with many of these new believers being martyred.

In *Chapter 7 and 14*; we see a unique, numbered group that will live during this time period. (144,00) They have been marked and sealed by the Lord and will fulfill a specific purpose.

In *Chapter 11*, we are introduced to the "two witnesses" from God. There have been many "witnesses" throughout history, we are called to be that today in our world. But there is no doubt, this is an interesting account that we can learn much from.

*Chapter 12*, reminds us of the great cosmic battle that is raging. Whatever God is giving birth to, the Dragon, Satan is trying to destroy it before it even begins.

*Chapter 13*, the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet come on to the stage. They will play a role, but their destiny has already been determined and they will fail to exalt themselves as the true God. An important truth to be seen here is that behind the evil rulers, empires, etc., is the real enemy.

*Chapter 14*, is full of the proclamation of the eternal gospel and the great harvest.

The 6<sup>th</sup> bowl is poured out in *chapter 16* and the Beast and his cohorts gather the "Kings" and nations of the earth together to battle against God and his people and his beloved city, Jerusalem. In Chapter 19, we see that there is a rider on a white horse who's called "Faithful and True" who returns to earth with the heavenly armies, (as promised) to defeat this assembled army with the power of his word. The Beast and False Prophet are captured and thrown into the lake of fire, the Dragon will be bound.

#### **5) Fall of Babylon the Great (Chapters 17-19)**

Don't be fooled or confused by the symbolism of the woman and the beast, but be informed by heavens host rejoicing over her judgment. In coming weeks, we will see that this very possibly may be a picture of the evil world system that is all around us today and has been in place since the fall. A system and institutions when uncovered in the end will reveal every evil you can think of, greed, arrogance, rebellion, hatred, and blaspheme of God, abuse of the innocent and helpless, slavery of every type are found in this "Babylon" and God will be justified in his judgment.

#### **6) The Rule of Jesus' Kingdom on Earth and the Judgements (Chapter 20)**

The thousand years (Millennium) mentioned here is a major point of contention in the church today. We will cover the different views on this in the weeks to come.

We see the judgment of Satan in this chapter, he and his hoards will never again harass, accuse or deceive God's people. We also see the judgment of the dead and the living before "*a great white throne and him who was seated on it*". Again we will address the judgments in more detail in the weeks to come.

#### **7) All things New (Chapter 21 & 22)**

Our relationship with God has been fully realized and the Bride (church) and the Lamb are front and center.

We see a New Jerusalem, a new Eden, there is no more pain or suffering, no more death or evil. We see no temples because God has come to be with his people and us with him, we will live in his presence forever.

## THE FOUR MAJOR WAYS TO INTERPRET REVELATION

Beaverton Foursquare Church

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*“None of the schools of interpretation can claim a monopoly on scholarship or faith. Each group numbers many fine scholars and devout Christian believers. Therefore, complete certainty in regard to the interpretation of the Apocalypse is not to be had. It is our duty to do the best we can, to study the various systems and accept the view that seems to us right, but always with a certain amount of reservation and of respect for the opinions of others. —Albertus Pieters \**

### We're after Conviction over Certainty

	<b>Ch. 1-3</b> Prologue (Ch. 1) and the seven churches	<b>Ch 4-19</b> Series of sevens (heavenly scenes, seals, trumpets, bowls, etc.)	<b>Ch. 20-22</b> Final Judgment, the New Heavens and Earth, and epilogue
<b>Preterist<sup>1</sup></b> All biblical prophecy has already been fulfilled, including Revelation.	<i>Symbolic and literal fulfillment within the 1st Century: all events described in Revelation happened shortly after the letter's writing.</i>		
<b>Idealist<sup>2</sup></b> Revelation is primarily a spiritual allegory.	<i>A symbolic narrative with no necessary link to historical events</i>	<i>Literary symbolism with no specific reference to past, present, or future events</i>	
<b>Historical<sup>3</sup></b> Revelation is descriptive of the Church Age that is in the process of unfolding.	<i>A mixture of past, current, and future Church history (from the viewpoint of 21st Century Christians)</i>		<i>Future Church history</i>
<b>Futurist<sup>4</sup></b> Revelation is chiefly about future events that have yet to happen.	<i>Historical narrative concurrent with John (major focus on “Ekklesia”)</i>	<i>“Things to come” most events will happen during a relatively brief period immediately preceding the future return of Jesus Christ. (almost no mention of “Ekklesia”)</i>	

1. **Preterist: Holders of this view see predictive prophecy from Daniel, Jesus’ Olivet Discourse, and Revelation, for example, as fully fulfilled within the 1st Century.**
  - a. Full Preterists have to spiritualize even the promised return of Jesus

- b. Preterists who still hold to a literal, physical return of Christ and refer to themselves as Partial Preterists.
  - c. This view was formalized in the 16th Century during the Counter Reformation as an answer to Protestant criticism that Rome and the Catholic Church were a persecuting apostasy.
2. **Idealist: This is an allegorical approach—where everything in the Revelation is part of a great symbolic drama and cannot be taken literally, but instead points to over-arching spiritual realities.**
- a. Some interpreters see the Revelation as structured like a Greek Drama, divisible into seven acts, each with seven scenes
  - b. Originated with the Alexandrian school of Theology represented by the early Church Fathers Clement of Alexander and Origen.
  - c. Augustine later offered a more moderate form of idealism. He regarded Revelation as a symbolic portrayal of the conflict between Christianity and evil—a conflict that takes place in history. He put it this way, “...the City of God versus the City of Satan.”
  - d. The Kingdom of Heaven doesn’t have to be established in society literally after the Day of the Lord, it can be and is subjectively present for the individual.
  - e. Fulfillment of prophecy is either entirely spiritual or recurrent. None of them (except the Second Coming, and Final Judgment for some idealists) will be fulfilled in a literal, physical, earthly sense either in the past, present or future.
3. **Historical: This view interprets the letter as a pre-written representation of Church history from John’s writing until the second coming of Jesus.**
- a. The dominant Protestant approach from the Reformation until the early-19th Century
  - b. It suffers a significant difficulty though. Each generation tends to interpret the book as climaxing in their time. Thus there have been many different interpretations of various symbols.
4. **Futurist: This view sees the letter as largely depicting future events, with the possible exception of chapters 1-3.**
- a. Chapters 4-19 depict a brief period of time immediately prior to Christ’s return.
  - b. Chapters 20-21 show the final culmination of God’s plan for the ages.
  - c. This approach is usually championed by conservative evangelicals who are typically premillennial
  - d. Its formalization is closely associated with Dispensationalism.

**Are there any clues in the text, and the Scriptures more broadly, that can help us choose a method?** For these reasons below among others, a Futurist approach often is commonly favored by theologically conservative evangelical Christians:

- **Historical/Grammatical method**
  - **Assumes that God is a good communicator**, that he speaks through human language as humans do and His meaning is resident within the normal grammatical structure of a given genre of literature.

- Versus reader-response (reader creates meaning...), or
    - Narrative approach (meaning is in the story, regardless of historicity, etc...)
  - **We don't read meaning *into* a text, we read it *from* the text where it already resides.**
  - **God is also active in history**, so the way language is used to communicate within a particular historical context—indeed that context itself—also helps us discern His meaning.
- **The prologue to Revelation**

1:9 *“Write, therefore, what you have seen (past), what is now (past for us, present for John) and what will take place later (future).” — Jesus’s instructions to John*
- **The literal fulfillment of past biblical prophecy** in the Gospels of so many OT prophets’ predictions and Jesus’ prophecies
  - **His death and resurrection, plus the destruction of the Temple** in AD 70, for example) are compelling.
  - **The historical accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry provide a “hermeneutic” (John 5)**. If God fulfilled so many of the Messianic promises in such exquisite, literal detail, why would He not do so in the way that’s revealed in John’s vision?
  - **We take symbolism as symbolism, but the narrative structure is “literal”** in the sense that it describes a sequence (or multiple sequences) of actual events that will take place.

*He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:*

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” —Isaiah 61:1-2a*

*Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*

*and the day of vengeance of our God,... Isaiah 61:2b*

If Jesus literally fulfilled the first part of the Isaiah 61 passage he read, would he not also literally fulfill the last line which he left off? The one about the Day of the Lord and the End of the Age? He is clearly the Rider on the White Horse in Revelation 19, so we can

expect a literal return to consummate the Day of the Lord and final judgment. Since that has not happened yet, the futurist view of the Revelation 19 prophecy seems reasonable.

### **EXAMPLE: The Great Babylon (Rev. 17-19)**

*Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. The name written on her forehead was a mystery: Babylon the great the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth. Rev. 17:3-5*

*I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. 19:11-16*

#### **Preterist Method:**

- Babylon is identified with either Rome or with Jerusalem
- If Rome, 17-19 describes the downfall of the Roman Empire and especially the city of Rome, the Harlot
- If Jerusalem, the scene describes the burning of Jerusalem by the Romans

#### **Idealist Method:**

- Babylon represents the world system as the seducer of the godly
- Imagery that seems to clearly point to Rome in John's time is more about the destruction of evil at the end of the age
- Ultimate judgment of the Harlot comes at Christ's Second Coming (the Rider on the White Horse)
- BUT, the Rider may simply be a symbol for the ultimate triumph of Christ's Gospel through preaching

#### **Historical Method:**

- The fall of Babylon the Harlot is the overthrow of the papal system of religion and government—yet to be seen in the future.
- The divergent reactions of the ungodly and the godly point to the final vindication of true religion

- The Rider on the White Horse represents the ongoing conquests of Christ through His Word, including His continuing campaign of judgment on those who make themselves His enemies.

**Futurist Method:**

- Babylon may represent an existing “church” or some future apostate system established by the Antichrist during the end times
- Babylon might also represent an actual city, either a restored Ancient Babylon or a reconstituted Rome
- Either way, this great enemy of truth and righteousness will be destroyed by the end of the Tribulation
- Jesus visibly returns to the Earth riding a white horse

*\*Dr. Pieters was one of the most prominent theologians of the Reformed Church in America until his death in 1955.*