
Revelation Introduction: Background Material

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This article also serves as the introduction to our Bible Study in the Book of Revelation.

Have you ever wondered what the book of Revelation is all about? Minus the nonsense and feeble theories we theologians (not to mention the sensationalists) seem to come up with, what is its purpose for you now concerning how you live and lead your life? Revelation is a much debated and often misunderstood book. It seems foreboding and unattainable to some, while being over-simplified and twisted by others. But, it does have honest, truthful, and literal meanings for us now. And, simply put, we can know about Revelation, as it is about God's power and purpose and how His plan will come about in our lives now and in a time to come.

Revelation is and has been the most controversial and difficult to understand book of the Bible. It has met its readers and redactors with suspensions, fears, and apprehension, as well as with excitement that fascinates and at the same time both confounds and awes us. Why is this so? Revelation is unique; it is not Gospel, nor is it instruction and doctrine, although it contains all of these. It is poetic with seemingly vague and elusive imagery that has sustained suffering Christians in all generations with consolation, encouragement, and hope as well as warnings of how things are and of things that are to come. Revelation and its truth are as precious and timeless as the rest of Scripture, if not even more so (Rev.1:9; 22:16).

This is a very difficult book to interpret and many gifted scholars over the centuries have taken very different views of it. This has caused divisions and conflicts that were needless and without purpose that, ironically, only served to give glory to the devil's ways while distracting us from its main purpose. To escalate this, many current sensationalists like to reinterpret Revelation to fit the latest news headlines and their own whims. Thus, I do not take my venture into Revelation lightly. In fact, having studied this book intensely for over 25 years in addition to all my degrees, readings, research, and experience has not prepared me for this quest. To think otherwise would be significantly arrogant. I approach this study as a fellow learner and as a humble student as I would with any of God's beloved books. My intention here is to stimulate your thinking and provide you with an honest and open look in to the book of Revelation from an Exegetical and Inductive perspective. I seek to honor the science and art of careful biblical interpretation and analysis. We will discover that John, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has given us something that is very important and clear for us to understand today, not just in the future.

That means I will seek to come to the text without preconceived, theological agendas or personal, eschatological viewpoints. Rather, I will be carefully researching word meanings and historical examination as well as context and comparing with other passages in Daniel, Ezekiel, and the teaching of our Lord from the Gospels. Besides, you may discover that Revelation has a deeper purpose for us today on how to watch, build, manage, and do our churches better! Thus, I will not sate the usual viewpoints and trends of the day, try to argue my view, or twist Scripture to fit my theological education or denominational agendas. Rather, my aim is to challenge the current thinking by seeking facts and honestly examining what God's inerrant Word says in context and in truth. Thus, my other intention is to challenge myself and perhaps your thinking, too, concerning end time events and theories and to seek sound reason and Scripture, not myths, traditions, or popular theorems. However, I want to state up front that whatever theory to which you or I subscribe is not as important as our love for the Lord and our desire for authentic spiritual growth. These are the things that are truly and eternally important! Arguing over conjecture or spurious, elusive doctrine does not bring glory to Christ; it only proves Satan! Warning: a lot of Christian writers love to embellish on this subject and give their own version of what will happen. But, the scores of books that have been written in the last hundred years have not panned out in their theories. It is "their" theories, not ones based on fact or careful study of Scripture. The Bible clearly tells us we do not have access to that information, for no one will know the time... (Mark 13:14-37).

Background and Setting

The Romans believed that there was a thin line between humanity and divinity, and their gods were often depicted as petty, conniving, dysfunctional principalities just as humans are. Thus, they demanded that people worship their Emperors.

Now, here comes a new "religion" in town that is rebelling against and disrupting the status quo. These followers challenged the loyalty and conformity of Rome and what it meant to be a Roman by claiming Christ as Lord and citing and pronouncing judgment of God for the Roman's oppressive ways. Revelation itself is an oracle of judgment on the oppressor and cryptic language of Babylon, Edom, and Kittim, referring to Rome. Consequently, the Romans considered this new Christian sect as subversive and the persecutions began under Nero who was paranoid about those who he considered subversive for fear of assassination. Then, the persecutions escalated with the other Emperors and came to fruition with Domitian, who was totally brutal. Faith, for the Romans, was seen in the state; Christians saw it in Christ. These two contradictory mindsets were not compatible in the market place of ideas. Faith is not in an institution or about false gods and Emperor worship. Rather, it is in the One True God who has a plan and purpose for us all.

Just as there was a new “religion,” now there came a new Emperor who was even more heinous than Nero, seeking to get Christians to worship him. The Romans were trying to force anyone who was devout and character-driven to worship their gods. This started for the Jews under the Emperor Caesar. For the Christians, right off the bat during the beginning of the Church, there were several — first Caligula, then Claudius, Nero (54-68 AD), Tiberius (14-37), Galba, Vitellius, Otho, Vespasianus, and Julius Sabinus (these Emperors reined less than a year and were mostly assassinated via being lynched, executed, poisoned, murdered by soldiers, executed and the such. I guess Nero’s paranoia was based on some fact. Ironically, Nero committed suicide!), Titus (79-81 AD) and then Domitian. James and Peter dealt with Nero, Paul dealt with Titus, and then there was Domitian (81-96 AD) who was the worst of all. The persecutions continued provincially under Nerva (96- 98) and Trajan (98-117). These dates are significant. Since Nero predates or is current to Revelation even for an early writing, this would make the events depicted as being current as well as pointing to future troubles the readers would see and experience themselves. We know history often repeats itself, so we can also see them in various forms and in what is still to come.

Some of the Christians were compromising, even forsaking their faith, falling prey to their situations, and not trusting in our Lord. The temptation of making life easier by following the ways of the world were as persuasive then as in our day. The dedication and discipline their faith required was negated as temptations continue to lure them, just as they do in our day. The other problem is that false teachings inter-tangled in the churches too. This is the same thing with which James and Peter dealt. Heretical teachings only glorify Satan and prove his ways of seeking to corrupt and distract people away from God (Rev. 2:2-4, 14-24; 3:1-17). Thus, the churches were in chaos; some were thriving, others were in apostasy, while others were being indifferent. Revelation was also meant to teach them to remain in Christ, be faithful, and have security and contentment in Him. Hence, what John has to say meant something significant and was understood. It is understandable and hopeful for us, too (Rev. 1:3; 22:10)!

Theme and Purpose:

Revelation is written to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor, which is now modern Turkey (Rev. 1:4, 11). The principle purpose for the writing is the encouragement and chastisement for how they were running their churches (Rev. 2:1-3:22). John was fully convinced that Christ would triumph over the forces of Satan and his work in the world. He then exhorted them to be faithful and discerning between what is false and what is truth, and also warned them not to worship the Emperor or to comply with evil, apathy, or compromise. He restated the importance of discipleship and Christian formation so they (we) can be authentic Christians of excellence and distinction, bringing no disrepute to Christ or His Church.

Revelation is about the victory Christ brings, giving hope for those who are in Him and fear for those who do not know Him (Rev. 2:13; 19:20-21; 20:10-15). As Christians, we can embrace Revelation rather than fearing it or the end times! God is the one who is in charge and in control. He has the big picture of the consummation of all humanity and history. He rules all of time and space, all events, and all actions; there is nothing in all of creation outside of His providence! Even in the darkest hours, God is in control. He will win and we who are in Him will be triumphant. Then, all of humanity will stand before the Throne, and all will be accountable; judgment for all who ever lived, rewards, condemnation, Heaven, and Hell await, and those who have oppressed His Church and children will be severely judged (Rev.1:12-16; 4:1-5:14)! Revelation is just as much about how we are to live as it is about what is coming. Our purpose is to understand that no matter what we have been through or will go through, God is in control and has our best interests in hand. Therefore, we can trust Him as we see His mighty hand throughout history and also in the future. We learn here on earth how we are to endure suffering and problems, not escape them, for there is no escape in a sin-infused world. Rather, it is how we discover and grow more from God's work in us regardless of our situation that matters.

John knows what the church is going through, for he has personally experienced it. He has also experienced Christ firsthand and now has been receiving updated files from Christ in the form of seven visions. John's visions bring hope as do all things in life when we are in Him. Our lives have significance and purpose; we are not alone for He is there with us. God is in command of all outcomes, the consummation, the fulfillment, the fruition, and the ultimate goal of His plan and purpose. Our call is to keep our churches in line with His precepts and in obedience (Rev. 4:1-5:14; 21:22-23; 22:5).

Revelation is also about the conflict between good and evil. It is both history and prophecy. It speaks to the first century churches of Asia Minor and it speaks to us today. For John's readers, this book was also about what was going on in their day and in their churches. Knowing what is coming is important for our hope, but not vital to how we are to grow in Him or our faithfulness in staying firm to His truth.

Thus, John meets them head-on with the truth and with hope. He reassures them that Christ has not gone away, but He knows of their circumstances and has His plan for them. John gives them glimpses of the wonders of Heaven (Rev. 4-16). John is seeking to restore their confidence in Christ, and to persuade them to be encouraged and hold fast to their faith. He does not want them to fall prey to pagan practices and temptations or to false teachings, but, rather to focus firmly upon Christ so He is Lord over all fears and situations. Christ has already secured the victory for life now and for eternity by His shed blood. Satan has been defeated and those who are evil and corrupt

have been judged and sentenced (Rev. 5:9-10; 12:11; 19:11-20:10). We are victorious. We are made for eternity to be in Him, and our real hope and home is still to come (Rev. 7:15-17; 21:3-4).

The bulk of Revelation is dedicated to John's seven visions in which Christ extols and rebukes the Church to get us to get our act together. John's visions give us a depiction of things to come—a future history of the world through the Second Coming and into eternity. John also gives significant details in imageries. John not only gives us a glimpse of things to come, he also tells us how Satan operates and how to be on guard. Revelation depicts how God is still in control even when Satan, the ultimate false prophet, the great dragon, and Beast is unleashed in his full power, causing insurmountable chaos and suffering. Satan is seeking to lead the world astray now just as he will in his final act by seeking to not only blaspheme Christ, but trying to counterfeit Christ and provide us with a variety of misrepresentations. He seeks to attack God's power and purpose and persecute those who are His (2 Cor. 11:14-15; Rev. 13; 17:1-9:10). Christ is the Divine Warrior who fights for us (Ex. 15:3; Isa. 59:16-18; 63:1-6; Eph. 1:13; Hab. 3:3-15; Zech. 9:13-15; 14:1-5; Dan. 7:1-8), and we can take hope because God is the One who is still seated on His throne and wins (Psalm 2:7; John 5:21-23; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 13: 1-10; 16:13; 17:14; 19:1-21). At the same time, God has his remnant who remain faithful and true to Him, because fulfillment is in Christ, not in the false words and deeds of the false prophet (Rev. 12:11). The theme for the Christians in this age is to learn and to trust, to obey and remain faithful even against all odds, so we can remain spiritually pure and continue to grow. Satan seeks us to worship him; when he can't, he seeks to disrupt us from who we are in Christ. Because Satan does not want us to be a good witness of Christ, he tries to sway us to only see our struggles, be seduced by the ways of the world, to conspire, fight, and gossip amongst ourselves, and to misunderstand or misuse our faith (Rev. 12:11; 14:4; 19:8; 21:9, 22-27). Revelation is not a puzzle for which we must endeavor to find a code or secret meaning, nor is it a source book for our inclinations, theories, or conjectures. Revelation is given so we can see God at work, His Wonder of Wonders, so we can pursue our faith with more diligence in trust and obedience, and to be prepared when He does return.

Authorship

The writer is clearly identified as John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee (Matt. 10:2), a prophetic witness and disciple of Jesus, and the writer of the Gospel of John (John 1:1; Rev. 1:1, 3-4, 9; 22:6-10, 18-19). Obviously, he was a Jew, shown by his use of the Old Testament and Targums (the Aramaic Hebrew Scriptures) and his knowledge of the Temple. He knew the Scriptures well. The author was also a significant church leader who spoke with great authority and was well known to the seven churches of Asia Minor, making a pseudo author or a second or third century writing impossible. Johannine authorship was accepted by the churches in Asia Minor without question as he was well known and it

would have been impossible to forge or be misrepresented. The Early Church also identifies John as the author, including Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, and Origen.

A few of the later Early Church Fathers, including African bishop Dionysius, concluded that the style of the Gospel of John was scientifically different from Revelation and thus one of them may not have been written by him. But, in later letters, Dionysius also said that it was plausible that John did write both. Liberal scholarship that sometimes seeks to minimize and neuter God's Word will contend for various other writers and very late writings, using their preconceived personal agendas instead of honest scholarship.

There are some problems in the Gospel of John and Revelation mainly due to some word usages and stylistic differences. However, what is in common as word usage is greater than what is in variance, contending for a singular author for both as well as his three epistles. When one closely examines Revelation, it can easily be seen that the genre is quite different being apocalyptic rather than narrative in nature. Therefore, obviously, there will be different words and styles imposed because the literature style requires it. John also borrows images and vocabulary from the book of Ezekiel as well as Daniel and Zechariah, contributing to the variances. Furthermore, any good writer can write in various genres as many do today, not to mention a possible time lapse between the Gospel (60-90AD) and Revelation (95AD). But ultimately, the human hands that penned the words or the secretary who dictated them is irrelevant as to the True Author — the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit and Jesus Himself (John 1:1, 10-11; 22:16-20).

Date and Occasion

John was exiled to the Island of Patmos around 95 AD during the writing of this Epistle. The Church was undergoing the beginnings of more severe persecution than what they initially went through in James' and Peter's time when the Roman Emperor Nero was blaming the Christians for the burning of Rome, (which he had caused) making them the scapegoat (54-68 AD). At this time, the Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD) had stepped up the persecutions severely, perhaps being the worst ever seen in Church history (Rev. 1:9; 2:9-13; 13:7-10). There are two opposing schools of thought for the date of Revelation. First is an "early date," approximately 64-68 AD, during the reign of Nero. The second is a "late date," approximately 95-96 AD, during the reign of Emperor Domitian. The main arguments for an early date are that the Temple, which was destroyed in 70 AD, seems to be still standing (Rev. 11:1-14). One of the main themes of the Book is support for the early Christians. Then we find the eight "kings" (Rev. 13: 3-14; 17:9-11). If these "kings" were the Roman Emperors that I listed in the Background and Setting, this would place the events as current to the First Century. The rebuttal to this is that these are given to us in a figurative sense, and/or that history repeats what they went through and will be repetitive.

However, the witness of the Early Church Fathers, confirmed by Irenaeus (185 AD), church tradition, and the Gospel of John as well as his comments in Revelation indicates that John was old and at the end of his life here. This sets up the possibility for the writing having been done as late as 95 AD, making it the last Scripture penned. However, since the 19th century, there has been contention against this view, arguing for an earlier date of 60 to 69 AD, prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. The contention is that the 90-95 AD view is very problematic, mainly due to the fact that the destruction of the Temple is the singular most climatic and important Jewish historical event since the Exodus of Egypt. It would be like writing a history of the 20th century and not mentioning the two world wars. It just seems problematical, as John make no assertion that the Temple has already been destroyed. The counter is that the Temple's destruction was so obvious, no mention was needed. The problem for an earlier date is that the Roman Emperors were in violent opposition to the Christians, so an earlier date after Nero's death seems unlikely when the great persecutions arose later in Domitian's rule in the 90s. Also, the Churches in Asia Minor were more in fruition in the 90s; in the 60s, many of them may not have even been planted yet. Further testimony of a late date is it is what the Early Church Fathers said. The date is significant, because an early date would support a Preterist or Partial-Preterist view whereas a late date would support a Futurist view. What is the truth? It is hard to tell since there is evidence on both sides, but the veracity of the evidence seems to indicate a late date.

Canonicity

Throughout its history and without question, the Church has accepted Revelation as Scripture. It is viewed as distinctive in its genre and authoritative for faith and practice. Revelation is the Inspired Word of our Lord God and is profitable for us to know, trust, and to obey!

Theological Value

Christ is Supreme and Glorified! Revelation shows us a future hope by Christ's finished work and sovereignty, the unity of the Church, and our eternal glory. We are given an eternal perspective to life and our purpose. Thus we need not fear our circumstances or the future.

Christ is depicted as Majestic King and Judge of the universe (Rev.1:12-20; 2:1-3:22). He addresses specific needs of the church as THE Church Growth Consultant, who warns us not to fail from lack of faith or disobedience at managing our Church. He tells us of our responsibility and obligations, and promises He is still in control and all will work out (Jer. 29:1-32; Rev. 2:7-17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21). Five of the seven churches in Asia Minor had severe problems. They were struggling with corruption, apathy, and discord. God knew that and wanted us to pursue Him, not our ideas and/or trends. Revelation helps us in understanding the social and political workings of our sinful nature and our chief

adversary, Satan. Its further theological value is shown by how John counters heresy and false teachings. These seven churches not only depict churches that were going on in John's time, they each portray how churches typify in their management and exercise, most missing the mark, purpose, and call He has for us. The call of the Church is to know Him intimately, grow in Him passionately, and worship Him wholeheartedly as His victorious witnesses (Rev. 2:1-3:22). When false or misguided Bible teachers seek to be dogmatic or twist Revelation to conform to their preconceived images, its relevance is devalued and congregations are deprived of their true impact and value. We are not to be overly literal, comparing first century imageries to the current headlines. Nor are we to ignore current events and miss Revelation's instructions for us. The overarching purpose of the book, as with any book, is our authentic spiritual growth and His impact on us so we can impact others! We must understand our responsibility to be truthful and honest whenever we engage God's most precious Word!

Genre and Destination

Revelation is from the Greek title word *apokalypsis*. This means "discourser of events," or "discourser of the apocalypse." It also means an "uncovering" or "unveiling" or as we have it in the English, a "Revelation." The other title that has been used is "The Apocalypse." Thus, Revelation is a book of disclosures of John's seven visions and God's exhortations. This is why sometimes it is rendered as a plural, "Revelations," even though the Greek word is singular. The proper name is Revelation. The disclosure for us is the unfolding of historical events — past, present, and future, with God's plan and purpose being the ultimate goal. Many people have feared Revelation and have thought it too mysterious to understand. But, Revelation was actually written to make things for us clearer—to expose and not conceal what God has for us.

Revelation is apocalyptic literature written in symbolism, poetry, and imageries, as well as Old Testament Prophecy style (Matt. 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21; Rev. 1:2-3; 19:9; 22:7-19), all woven as a tapestry describing literal events (Rev. 1:1-4). John also uses the language in his current Greco-Roman figures of speech. Revelation has three main sections — a greeting and theme (Rev. 1:1-4), then the main body (Rev. 1:4-22:21) which contains the succession of visions of spiritual warfare, warnings, and judgments, climaxing with the Second Coming of Christ, and finally a farewell (Rev. 22:21). Yet, the figurative speech and images, although borrowed from the Old Testament, would have been clear to an educated First Century Jew. It may not be a style we are familiar with in our contemporary culture, but it was very popular from 200 BC to 200 AD. Consider that describing our modern life with cars, freeways, electronics, and computers to a first century person would be unrecognizable and incomprehensible imageries. What we take for granted, in what we know and what they knew, does not measure up in understanding one another. Revelation and its imagery were real and had application for them as they are real and have application for us, too.

Much of the imagery was given to have a response from his readers, to evoke them from complacency on to spiritual activity. These images can be literal events as well as symbols. They can apply to the Church of Asia Minor and be reapplied to us. Sometimes John explains them; sometimes they are vague and we may not know what they mean until that day is upon us (Rev. 1:20). Thus, there are no real mysteries other than when these events will happen or which ones had happened and the sequence of these events. However, time and sequence were not important to a Jewish mind or to our God who wants us focused upon Him as Lord. What we learn in our preparations is far more valuable than what will come about.

Much of what is spoken of in the Old Testament for Israel and the tribulation are found in Revelation 6-19. Its principle purpose is to reveal Christ as Lord and the end of the age. It also gives us firm instructions on how to live our lives being faithful to Christ and receiving His promise as well as His warnings. Revelation brings a lot of controversy because it is interpreted so varyingly. We need to come to Revelation without a specific view, because each prophecy and image can have multiple meanings and multiple fulfillments. Most of the Bible is very precise, but apocalyptic literature is difficult because God has not given us the final key. In addition, Revelation is about relationships and events in an Oriental logic form that does not have Western philosophical chronology in mind. Therefore, we must beware not to read into it our current idealistic methodologies.

Interpretive Difficulties

This book of Scripture is called “apocalyptic” writing, and it is a form of prophecy. Apocalyptic writing is a type of literature that warns us of future events but in which the full meaning is hidden to us for the time being. Apocalyptic writing is almost a secret, giving us glimpses through the use of symbols and imagery of what is to come. We may not know the meanings now, but time will reveal it. The key to unlocking these imageries is seeking what they meant back then and how the churches in Asia Minor would have understood them, not what they mean in a current newspaper, 2000 years removed, which also removes any cultural or language understandings. Apocalyptic writing is found in Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Matthew as well as in Revelation.

Prophecy, as literature and meaning for us today, contains past, present, and future events. Examples include the many prophecies concerning Jesus that already have been fulfilled, and parts of Daniel and Revelation, as well as Matthew 24 that will yet come to pass. Prophecy does not always follow a clear logical and systematic pattern, often jumping from thought to idea to another point and so forth. It also may jump over large periods of time. Thus, in Prophecy, we need to be aware of two essential forms of language.

First there is the Literal (Didactic). This is the simple and direct meaning, or in other words, what it says is what it means. It has a plain meaning. Zechariah, chapter seven is a good example, as are much of Isaiah and Jeremiah. The imagery had a clear meaning to the people to whom it was first presented, so don't jump to conclusions or read in what is not there. If you get frustrated with it, put it aside. Most Bible scholars debate the meaning, so it is improbable that you will have a clear insight. Some people are not ready or able to comprehend this part of the Bible; if so, that is OK! Focus on the parts of Revelation that are crystal clear.

The second form of language is the Figurative (Predictive). This is the category into which most of prophecy and thus Revelation falls. We are to always view prophesy with the attitude that it has a plain meaning until we have clear and compelling reasons to place it in the figurative category. Our task is to determine the points and ideas that apply today and point to tomorrow. The bottom line is that it will happen at some point in history, and come to pass in a literal and plain way. We may not understand it until it is right on top of us. Daniel 7-12; Joel 2; Isaiah 11; and Zech. 4 are clear examples of figurative language. Furthermore, some of the language in Revelation is "word pictures" that John is trying to describe in their language and culture as well as technology, such as Daniel, chapter seven, and many parts of Revelation. For example, if he was describing events we might see in our lifetime, how would he describe a helicopter if he had never heard of or seen one? For most parts of Revelation, John was using imagery from Ezekiel, Daniel, and other Jewish literature that they would have known. Unfortunately, today few of some so called Bible scholars who write the popular books are even aware that there is an Old Testament, let alone how to inductively read it. The key to the understanding of Revelation is in the Old Testament!

Apocalyptic writing can also be cryptic and symbolic such as the fish which was a secret greeting to see if another person was a Christian, too. When we come to words that seem peculiar to our modern minds such as stars, the first-century Jews would know that it meant "angels." Lampstands meant "churches;" the phrase, wife of the Lamb meant "Jerusalem," and the great prostitute was a covert slogan to refer to "Nero" or any corrupt leader in power. Babylon was referring to Rome (Rev. 1:20; 17:1-5, 18; 21:9-10). Consequently, the inscription key is understanding the Old Testament and Jewish customs and thought, not today's newspaper headlines!

It is important to note that 28% of the Old Testament is prophecy, most of which came to pass in the life and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament has over 20% prophecy too, of which most (although this is debated) have not yet come to pass. Thus, prophecy is important because God has dedicated a significant portion of His Word to it. Again, do not read in what is not there!

The Main Views of How Revelation is Interpreted

The first part of Revelation is fairly clear, extolling the Church for what it is doing and criticizing because of where it should be. Most of the debates lie in Revelation 6:1 through 18:24. Because of the aforementioned reasons, many people have come to varying conclusions. Some of them are as follows.

First is the **Preterist view**, meaning they “favor the past.” This view came about in the 17th century under the Jesuits. They presuppose that most, if not all the prophecies of the Apocalypse have been fulfilled and/or pertain to what was happening in the first century. The fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple are the main themes and events and they believe accordingly that Nero is the anti-Christ and thus past events have been completed. Therefore, the main point of Revelation was to encourage the Christians under persecution. For those who accept this view, Revelation becomes just historical and didactic, giving us only examples of being faithful. Most with this view subscribe to the apocalyptic outcome of earth and humanity of devastation and ultimate doom. This view is practical and views Revelation as mainly principles. The problem with this is that the Book of Revelation probably was not written until after the destruction, so how could there be a prophecy if the events have already occurred? Their response is Revelation was written between 67 and 68 AD. The main problem is, if these climactic events already happened, why is there no mention by the Early Church Fathers? The stars did not fall from heaven (Matt. 24:29), in addition the one-third of all animals or humans were not killed (Rev. 9:18; 16:3) in A.D. 70 or any time in global history thus far. Another problem is that Rome was not overthrown by God and the Christians did not have any victory. This view is favored amongst some Reformed peoples and mostly by liberals. There is also a Partial- Preterist view that says some of the events have occurred but not all such as the Second Coming, which is in hot debate. This view has wider acceptance over the pure Preterists view and is growing today.

Second is the **Futurist view**, and asserts that Revelation is about the details and order of future events immediately preceding the Second Coming. This view was held by some of the second and third century Church Fathers (although this is disputed), and is popular amongst most Evangelicals today. This view asserts that none of the events in 70 AD or what Jesus describes in Matthew 24 had occurred or had any bearing on the prophecies of the Apocalypse or the tribulations that mark the period just prior to Jesus' Second Coming. The seals, trumpets, beasts, and Antichrist are still to come and will appear in the last days of human history. Then, Christ will come back to reign and judge, and establish a millennial kingdom. Thus, most of Revelation is yet to be fulfilled, and its only value is for the Christians living in that age to come, making it irrelevant to numerous generations. The problem with this view is that the destruction of Jerusalem was the most significant event for the Jew and Early Church, and must not be disregarded too lightly. Also this view relies heavily upon the view that Israel and the church are distinct in God's plan which is very

debatable as Christ's is for all Greek and Jew alike (Rom. 9-11; 1 Cor. 10:32). Obviously the first 5 chapters are current history in John's time and the genre indicates that chapters 6 through 22 are in a future tense and view (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 9:24-27; John in 6-18; 1 Thes. 4:16; Rev 3:10).

The Third is the **Idealist view**, which came about under 19th century liberalism. This view maintains that the prophecies of the Apocalypse are not specific events or indicate any specific historical or future happening. Rather, they are only poetry and symbolisms. This view ascertains principles and ideas of our war with Satan, and will repeat in various forms until the Second Coming. Its only value is teaching us that good will eventually have victory over evil. The problem is that those who hold this view refuse to associate the images with any specific future events, and miss the point that Revelation is written in an apocalyptic genre, and thus the language is clear, that the images and themes have or will have history and significance (Rev. 4:1). The fact is that Revelation does teach us how Satan operates and we can use these principles for understanding and combating Spiritual Warfare. In addition, these principles have been in play and at work all through church history. However, this view ignores the veracity of prophecy.

The fourth view is the **Historicist view**, started in the 13th century under Joachim of Floris (1202), and portrays Revelation as a template for principles of history. It is a panoramic depiction of the history and future of the Church. This is an easy view to take as many events from Nero, the Roman papacy were all versions of the antichrist, as the Middle Ages, the French Revolution, and two World Wars to mention a few. All such events depict the outline that Revelation gives us. This is why so many Christians in those days said that those were the last days. Calvin and Luther held mostly to this view, too. This view asserts that the prophecies of the Apocalypse are an outline of church history and take place over a 2000+ years period of time, climaxing with Jesus' Second Coming. Its purpose is primarily to encourage Christians of any age. The problem is the images and themes become speculative and subjective and any interpretation becomes prejudiced to the current news of the day.

The fifth view is the **Open or Pan view** (it will pan out). This means we engage the text with careful exegesis, uninhibited by theological prejudice, with an inductive process and come with open minds to discover God's lessons for us. If not, our preconceived ideas will form our opinions and not what the Word actually says. This is how the Reformers, Calvin and Luther, did their studies (although they subscribed to the Historicist view), as well as Augustine (who was mostly a Futurist) and other great men. They were seeking His revealed truth inductively, applying literal interpretation (if the genre allows), historical and grammatical exegesis and not mere human speculations and traditions. This is what we seek to do at Into Thy Word.

First of all this is not an essential issue, as eschatology is debatable and has no real bearing on orthodoxy versus unorthodoxy. Nor is this even an important issue, as God is far more concerned with our faith formation and practice than our debate techniques and quibbling. You can be a good deep-seated Christian of the Faith whatever view you subscribe too. Thus, if you hold to a Preterist view and your friend is a Futurist none of you are engaged in heresy, although one of both of you will be wrong! Just make sure you pray, research and think them through. What is wrong and distracting to both Christians and especially non-Christians is when we allow sensationalism and getting carried away with the latest captivating trends of popular or Christian culture. Why? Because the future has not happened yet, as Christ has not come back yet, thus it is foolish to be dogmatic on any human theory. Our sensationalisms will only serve Satan and scoffers and not give glory to Christ!

Each of the first four views has both merit and deficiencies, all based on human logical reasoning. All of these views can be found in Revelation, but all have significant holes that other parts of Revelation, as well as the other Scriptures, contradict. Each of these views is within the scope of biblical orthodoxy and can be debated academically without assault to faith and practice. It is fair to both faith and academics to seek each view, taking what is Biblical and merited and rejecting what is not, and still be rationally honest. In fact, this is the best approach that brings us to the fifth view. The fifth one is based on how open and honest we can be and how we obey the rules of Scriptural interpretation, especially word meanings and context. Thus, I believe the proper interpretation is not any of these views specifically or dogmatically. Rather, each one has its good qualities and can be incorporated in the passages where the context and purpose arises.

We are all human and all we know and see comes through our fallen filter made from depravity. We must still do the best we can do. It is always best not to bow to anyone's reasoning, but take a clear look for ourselves. It is most probable that each of these views will be in the tapestry of how the events have and will unfold before us. And, when they actually do, as Scripture indicates, all will be made clear to us (Matt. 24). But, whatever view we take (and no view is as important as the honor and reality that He is coming) will be dramatically expressed in due time, His timing, not ours (Thess. 2:1-12; Rev. 1:3; 22:20). Thus, it is my endeavor to go into Revelation and bring you what it says, not what I or others think it says.

The Varying Views of the Millennium

The Millennium is the Latin word for a thousand years, as in bound him for a thousand years (Rev. 20:2). The Greek, Chiliasm, meaning one thousand years, is mentioned six times. It basically means a thousand-year period of time or a long period of time, that Jesus Christ has victory over evil and corruption (1 Cor. 15:24-28; Rom. 8:19-21; 2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 14:6-18; 19:11-16), and will

physically and spiritually rule over all of the earth (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:28-30; Rev. 20:1-10) from His throne in Zion/Jerusalem (Isa. 65:17-25; Zeph. 3:11-13; Zech. 9:9-10; 14:16-21). Jesus and His glory is seated on the throne, and the righteous (those who accepted Christ) will be clothed by His righteousness with authority and inhabit the New Kingdom (Dan. 7:22; Matt. 19:28; 25:34; Luke 12:32; 22:28-30; 1 Cor. 6:2; Rev 2:5), fulfilling the Kingdom of God on earth (Matt. 16:18-19; 26:29; Mark 14:25; Heb. 8:11).

What the Millennium means is also in debate as to whether it indicates a literal thousand-year reign, a figurative time period not limited to time, or an era of church history. Most biblical scholars hold that there will be a Millennium as a fact as with Election. The debate is over how long it is and when it will occur. As for election, the debate is over what is meant by God's foreknowledge or His purpose. And, of course, as with the interpretations, there are several views:

First is the **Premillennialists** view which says that the Second Coming of our Lord will take place before the millennium in which Jesus will literally reign on earth for a thousand years (Rev. 19:11-21). People with this view usually subscribe to the Futurist view. Satan will be bound and we will live in harmony and peace with one another here on a new earth. Christians will receive new bodies and those who died will be re-birthed also in new bodies. Most believe Satan gets out of his prison for a short time, leads a rebellion, and then there will be a final judgment at the end of the Millennium. Justin Martyr and Papias held this view, as the Early Church was mostly premillennial in its thinking for the first three centuries of the church. They considered Jesus' return to be imminent.

Second is the **Amillennialists** view, and believes that Jesus is reigning now since His resurrection, that there is no literal thousand-year millennium before or after Christ returns to earth (Rev. 20:1-6). People with this view usually subscribe to the Historicist view. They see an allegorical or symbolic approach to prophecy. The major proponents are Covenant and Reformed theologians, and most mainline denominations. Since there is no literal thousand-year reign, Millennium refers to the preeminent reign of Christ in this age, covenant, or dispensation (Rev. 6:9-10; 20:5). The resurrection of the Christians refers to the new life in Christ and/or their life in eternity of Heaven (Rom. 6:8-11; Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1-4). They believe that Satan is bound already and is limited in his activities here on earth (John 12:31; Col. 2:15). They believe that the rapture and the Second Coming are simultaneous events and realities to come as Christ returns to earth before the millennium. There is a splinter group, Dispensational Premillennialism, which believes that the Second Coming occurs in two stages; the first is the rapture of the church, then after seven years, Christ returns with his church to rule on earth. This view has a literal interpretation of prophecy.

The third is the **Postmillennialism** view, that Christ returns after the millennium because the Church will expand and will have evangelized all of the world (Rev. 19:11-21). People with this view usually subscribe to the Futurist

view. Their main point is the victory of Christianity over the entire world. Thus, Christ will not return until all people groups have been reached. They make no distinction between the rapture and Second Coming, as most view it as one event.

The disputes in these three main views (oh yes, there are lots of others, but none worth mentioning) center on the chronological makeup of Revelation, what happens when what comes first (Ezek; Rev. 19:11-21 verses 20:1-10). Premillennialists believe that chapter 20 follows the Second Coming, whereas other groups do not see it that way. Jewish literature is usually not based on time sequence or chronology as Greek and Western literature are. Rather, it typifies relations and events over the time of those events. Each of these passages are descriptions and are not necessarily in any sequence other than how they relate to one another (Rev. 6:14; 11:18; 16:14-16; 17:14; 19:11-21; 20:1-15). When our Western mind looks at the Oriental thinking, we tend to read in our philosophical notions and forget the historical and cultural relevance. Thus, our interpretations must be made with an awareness of first century thought, not how we think 2000 years removed. Again, we must exercise caution and discernment and not take any human position literally other than Christ will return in His good time, and the details will follow. The Bible makes it clear, Christ's Second Coming, will happen at any time, where He will return to earth and establish a literal kingdom (Matt.. 19:28; Rev. 20) and reign for a literal thousand years. This will happen unstipulated to us as a *thief in the night* (1 Cor. 4:5; 15:51-52; 16:22; Phil. 3:20; 4:5; 1 Thess. 1:10; Heb. 10:37; James 5:7-9; 2 Peter 3:8-15; 1 John 2:28; Rev. 1:1; 22:6). We may not agree what the sequence is and the symbols mean, but we can all agree that when the last days are upon us, it will be clear. We will have at hand unprecedented suffering, evil, and persecutions, and God will pour out His wrath on an evil world while saving those who are in Him. So, be prepared by being obedient and faithful to our Lord!

If Revelation is still confusing to you, be assured that there is no need to adopt or adhere to any particular viewpoint. In addition, none of us should be captivated to any one point. Understanding Revelation and all of the various theories and perspectives is not that important. These are debatable points. Who Christ is in you and your trust in Him to work it all out is all that is important!

Tribulation Terms

The Great Tribulation is the time Jesus warned of as Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7), the ending of the age, (Rev. 6-19 Matt. 24; 25.70) and the week is a day of the Lord of Daniel (Dan. 9:27, Thess. 5:2).

- Preterism means fulfilled eschatology, the belief that the date, 70 AD, that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24 was all fulfilled. The Tribulation teaching is in reference to the rapture and resurrection of the saints.

- Pre-tribulation. This view believes that the Church will not go through the tribulation but will be raptured away to heaven, and the Tribulation is specifically to break the will of Israel and save them as a nation, as well as to have the world repent because of the judgments found in the book of Revelation.
- Mid-tribulation refers to a mid seventieth-week rapture. The church will be taken out before the Great Tribulation which occurs when the Antichrist goes into the Temple and declares himself God approximately 1,260 days before Christ comes back.
- Post-tribulation believes that Christ will come back at the end of the Tribulation and those who remain alive through it are raptured. There are four views within this position as well: Classic, semi-classic, futurist, and dispensational.
- Partial-rapture subscribes that only those who are watching, waiting, and are making themselves prepared will go.
- Pre-rapture-wrath is a three-fourths view that believes the church will go through much of the tribulation to purify and perfect the bride.

We need to come to Revelation without a specific view, as each prophecy can have multiple applications, meanings, and fulfillments that can be true. We must come to Revelation with patience and humility, seeking dialog and cooperation not disagreements and strife, for that is what is clearly in err. We are to interpret in light of the historical context and what it meant then because John's readers did not have a modern newspaper or CNN. And, for us to think that Revelation meant nothing for 2000 years until our generation came is extremely arrogant and dismissive to the countless Christians who came before us, upon whose shoulders we stand. Revelation is for all generations, not just ours or one to come! Also, we must never seek to be dogmatic with our feeble opinions and limited understandings. In addition, the applications in Revelation are for us now, as they were also active in the early Church and will have further meaning and fulfillment in the time to come. Revelation is not just about the first Christians, nor is it just about what will happen in some distant future. These precepts are for us today, for us to know, for us to use, and for us to deploy deeply in our lives and walk in Christ. What we do know is Christ is coming back! When Satan will be finally be defeated is not known, but God will comfort and take care of us!

Revelation's purpose is not to satisfy our dogmatic assertions and speculations. Let us not bother with unwarranted calculations, to which we have no idea or call to do. Rather, let us seek His precepts so we can grow further in our spiritual formation and make Him known to others!

Revelation is about our genuine discipleship and growth in Christ and how He impacts us so we can impact others. In His time, it will be clear without dispute (Acts 1:7). Revelation continues to add to our spiritual growth and faithfulness and encourage the Church through persecutions and the daily stresses of life. What we have to know is what we need to know. We do not need to know what He has not yet revealed, as our duty is to our spiritual formation and the expansion of the Kingdom, not idle speculations and argumentations. The purpose for our lives here is to learn and grow in Him over any theological agenda. What we learn in our preparations is far more valuable than what will come about. To live in a sin-infused world is difficult and we need the Savior and Lord to guide us through it. Our lives, circumstances, and experiences will bring us trials and testing before we learn the lessons we are taught. What we learn from Him will help us be vigorous, victorious, and able to overcome anything life or Satan can throw at us.

This article also serves as the introduction to our Bible Study in the Book of Revelation.

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 - i. Benediction
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 - v. Fifth Seal: The Martyrs under the Altar (6:9-11)
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- f. Second Series of Visions of the Seven Angels/Trumpets (8:2-11:19)
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 - v. Fourth Trumpet: A Third of the Sun, Moon, and Stars Struck (8:12-13)
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 - vi. Fifth Bowl: Pain and Darkness (16:10-11)
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- i. The Fifth Series of Visions; Judgment on Babylon and Vindication of the Church (17:1-19:10)
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- a. The time is near, do not seal up the Book (22:6-11)
- b. The testimony of Jesus, the Spirit, and the Bride (22:12-17)
- c. Warning not to tamper with the Book, and closing Blessing (22:18-21)

Theme Verse: They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings — and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers. (Revelation 17:14)

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