

The Book Of Revelation.

Week 2.

What is the best interpretation to take?

When studying the Book of Revelation to uncover its true meaning and gain the best understanding, the best rule to follow is this.

Where the text is not obviously symbolic, take the text at face value.

Where the text is symbolic, look for an interpretation offered in the same passage. If there is none, then look at other passages where this symbol is used.

For instance, the beast with ten horns in Revelation 13 is not clearly defined as the antichrist. But Daniel 7 also describes a beast with ten horns, and is clearly referencing a final empire which persecutes God's people for three and a half years.

Over the years, bible scholars have arrived at different interpretations for the timing of the rapture, and the meaning of the Millennium. To make matters more confusing, there are also four different interpretations for the timing of the whole story of the book of Revelation, some claiming it's all in the past, others claiming we are mid-way through the events of this book, still others who believe that the book can only be understood as a parable, and finally others who believe that the whole story is yet to unfold.

The Book of Revelation was written by John, a Jewish man who understood the Bible from an Old Testament perspective. At the time of writing Revelation, the New Testament was still in the process of being written. Therefore, to grasp the true meaning, we must begin with the Old Testament backdrop and the context provided by the prophets and also then focus on what Jesus says. This method ensures a more accurate interpretation, rooted in the original Jewish context of the text.

Within the Book of Revelation, there isn't a new storyline. There isn't new logic. Instead, it reiterates themes and narratives found in both the Old and New Testament. Therefore, Revelation should not be interpreted as a stand-alone book. To understand it fully, we need to consider its connection to the broader biblical narrative.

All throughout the history of the Bible, God repeats storylines and messages. An example of this is the Exodus story. In Exodus, a series of plagues is released upon Pharaoh and Egypt, each worsening over time. Similarly, in the Book of Revelation, we see a progression of judgments with the seven seals, trumpets, and bowls of wrath.

The Exodus can serve as a backdrop and foreshadowing of how Revelation unfolds, with Pharaoh representing an Antichrist figure. And Jesus coming to rescue his people out the

Judgement revelation events, just like Moses rescued the Jewish people out of the judgement events in Egypt.

Each of the following views are supported and taught by theologians, illustrating the genuine confusion about which one is correct. The 4 Main Views of the timing of the story line from the book of Revelation are as follows.

Number 1. The Preterist View.

The preterist view believes that the events foretold by Jesus in Matthew 24, which are then detailed in Revelation, happened in A D seventy, Emperor Nero being the antichrist.

However, the problem with this theory is that Jesus did not return immediately after A D seventy. How do people arrive at this interpretation? From the verse Matthew 24 verses 34 “.. this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened...”.

But, we have not seen Jesus return yet, so the tribulation events described by Jesus cannot be a past event. Preterists tend not to be too concerned with any future implication of the book of Revelation, as they conclude that everything described in the book has already happened.

Number 2. The Historicist View.

This view assigns particular eschatological prophecies to significant events in history, so for instance they might claim that a particular war represents the red horse, or that a certain period of inflation represents the black horse.

They accept that some prophecies from the book of Revelation are yet to be fulfilled, but claim that many are already fulfilled, therefore they think we are already in the tribulation period.

Subscribers to this view usually believe in the imminent return of Jesus. This view can diminish the fear of God, as the events they associate with judgment prophecies are far less severe than those foretold in the Bible, and they believe some have already occurred, making them seem less worrisome.

Revelation 6 verse 6 says that a loaf of bread will cost a days wages, and that the pale, green horse event of chapter 6 verse 8 will kill a quarter of the earth with sword, famine, plague and wild beasts. To claim that these judgment events have already happened is to suggest that the detail in the book of Revelation is exaggerated. This can only serve to detract from the integrity of God's word.

Number 3. The Symbolic, Idealist View.

This viewpoint interprets the book of Revelation as a symbolic struggle between good and evil. The events of this period are not symbols that can be interpreted directly, instead the story of the book is simply a parable which illustrates that God will judge evil, and triumph over the devil ultimately. This view is taken by some of the traditional church who don't want to tackle the book of Revelation, but would rather park the whole subject. It is the ultimate ostrich sticking its head in the sand.

Number 4. The Futurist Literal View.

Finally, this view, simply takes the text at face value. Beginning with prophecies of Daniel and other prophets, which the text states pertain to the end times, and continuing with Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21 and the book of Revelation, there is a sequence of future events that lead up to the return of Jesus.

Which of these 4 views do you think is better evidenced in scripture, and most likely to produce a harvest of repentance and salvation?

As you can see from the four different viewpoints, only one leads you towards repentance and the fear of the Lord. The others encourage a more carefree attitude to the end times.

We will apply viewpoint number four, the futurist perspective, for many reasons. It is the safest angle based on how the Bible describes Jesus's return. This includes the teachings of the main prophets and Jesus Himself. They all had much to say about Jesus's return, and since we have not yet witnessed His return, this viewpoint makes the most sense.

The Rapture

There Are Two Main Views Regarding This Topic.

1. Pre-Tribulation. This is the belief that the church will be raptured before the tribulation period begins, the short name for which is pre-trib.
2. Post-tribulation. This is the belief that the church will be raptured at the end of or after the tribulation period, the short name for which is post-trib. This is divided up in post-wrath or pre-wrath, meaning either before the seven bowls of wrath, or after the bowls of wrath. However, it will occur toward the end of the tribulation period.

Verses Used To Support The Pre-Trib Rapture Include The Following.

1. Some say that Jesus promised the church in Philadelphia that they would escape the tribulation period in Revelation 3 verse 10. "I will keep you from the hour of trial". However the word "keep" does not mean to take out, but rather to protect or guard. So this verse is debatable as evidence.

2. Jesus says in Luke 21 verse 36. “Pray that you have strength to escape all these things...”. However the preceding verse says that the day of the Lord will come as a snare on all those who dwell on earth. It can be argued that this trap is the eternal destiny that these events will lead people to, if they do not trust God.

3. Some say that when John wrote in Revelation 4 verse 1. “Come up here and I will show you what must take place”. Some say that he was in the vision taking part in the rapture and of course this occurs at the beginning of the book, before the first seal is opened. But there is no evidence that John's ascension was in fact a vision of the rapture.

4. Similar to the previous verse, John also says at the beginning of Revelation in chapter 1 verse 7. “Behold he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him”. Pre-trib adherents say that this is a response by John as he sees Jesus returning to rapture the church before the tribulation. However, this is most likely a statement summarizing the final outcome of the tribulation period.

5. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 9: God has not destined us for wrath. Pre-trib adherents say that here, wrath means the tribulation period. Post-trib adherents will point out that the Greek word for wrath means anger, vengeance and punishment. Therefore it could also mean the eternal punishment of hell. There is a difference between wrath and tribulation. Tribulation is all around us, as seen in places like North Korea and Africa, where people are already dying and suffering daily for their faith as well as many others all over the world. However, we are not appointed to God's wrath. Jesus never says we are exempt from tribulation; in fact, He says the opposite—that we will face many troubles.

This topic has been extensively debated over the years, with well-known and respected born-again believers holding firm to different views.

All the scripture verses that teachers use to support the Pre-Tribulation view require inference. The text does not directly state that we will escape and not be present in tribulation period, nor that Jesus will come back twice, once for the church and then for the Second Coming.

Verses Used To Support the Post-Trib view

There are lots of verses that describe the rapture in the bible but there are only 4 verses specifically in the entire bible that refer to the timing of the rapture and these are as follows.

Verse 1. Matthew 24 verses 29 to 31: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. The stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man

coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other". Some will argue that the word "elect" means the Jewish believers, but in all other places in the New Testament, this word refers to the church.

Verse 2. Paul describes the rapture in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 51 to 52. "Behold I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet shall sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

Some argue that Paul's last trumpet is different to the last trumpet of the book of Revelation. However the simplest view to take is that they are one and the same. This places the rapture at the end of the 7 trumpets, not before the tribulation period.

Verse 3. Thessalonians 2 verses 1 to 3. "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed". At face value, these verses say that Jesus will not return, and we will not be gathered to him until the antichrist is revealed. Furthermore it groups the return of Christ with the rapture, indicating that these happen together. Christ returns at or after the 7th trumpet, which indicates that the rapture has the same time frame.

Verse 4. Mark 13:24-27 - "But in those days, following that distress, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. the stars will fall, from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. Again this verse says following the distress days.

The Best Approach.

Regarding the rapture, we believe in preparing for the worst. If we are raptured before the tribulation period, that's a bonus. However, if you are only preparing to be raptured before the tribulation period, and it doesn't happen, you could very easily fall prey to denial, disappointment, confusion, rejection and a whole range of difficult emotions which will not help you deal with this severely distressing period.

The other thing to remember is that the pre-trib view only gained popularity after 1830, when a preacher John Darby accepted an interpretation given in a dream to a certain Margaret Macdonald from Scotland, which convinced the hearers that the church would certainly not face this time of tribulation. Most early fathers of the faith, including the apostles, believed that they would pass through the tribulation period.

Best View To Take Regarding The Millennium.

The Millennium is a thousand year period where Jesus reigns as King. It is mentioned only briefly in Revelation 20 verse 4 and 5. "And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years".

However there is plenty of scripture in the Old Testament describing a time when a descendant of David will literally rule from Jerusalem.

Jesus also mentioned the Millennium when he told the disciples that they would sit on thrones with him in the regeneration.

However for most, it is too extravagant an idea that the same Jesus who walked with the poor of Galilee will return, not as a baby, but as a warrior king, not to perform a u-turn to collect his church, but to remain on Earth for a thousand years to show the great love and justice of God through his reign to a world who has only known sin and corruption.

As theologians have sought to rationalize this awesome idea, they have come up with an interpretation which turns the Millennium into something far less than awesome, and more abstract.

The Post-Millennial View.

This is the view that Jesus will return at the end of the Millennium.

By re-jigging the sequence of events described in the book of Revelation, theologians have suggested that the crucifixion of Jesus was actually the event that threw Satan into the abyss, and began the 1,000 year reign.

Of course it is now 2,000 odd years since Jesus' crucifixion, so the post-millennial view has adapted the timescale. They explain that the word Millennium simply represents a long time.

However adherents of this view maintain that Jesus is reigning from Heaven, Satan is bound in the abyss, and we are in the Millennium. The problems with this theory are many. Today Satan is anything but bound, rather, he is very active. This theory also ignores all references to Jesus reigning from Jerusalem, and ignores any future role that has been prophesied for Israel

The Premillennial View.

This is the view that Jesus will return before the Millennium to rule from Jerusalem. Once Jesus has defeated the antichrist, He will rule Israel for 1,000 years, and all the world will submit to his rule. His title as King of kings will finally become an earthly reality. All prophecies regarding Israel will be fulfilled during this time.

Replacement Theology

A significant portion of the church over the years has replaced Israel with Jesus and the church. Many people today in the church believe this and hold firmly to it.

Replacement theology is the belief that the church is the new or true Israel, having permanently replaced or superseded Israel as God's chosen people, ushering in a new kind of Kingdom.

Holding this viewpoint means the interpretation of the Book of Revelation will diverge significantly from what the Bible actually says as literal fact. If this is the view you hold, there are huge dangers if you are wrong and are alive during the time of tribulation, as you may not understand what is happening and fail to be prepared as Jesus commands us to be.

We believe that God always keeps His promises and covenants throughout all time. He never breaks them. There are many covenants and promises to the Jewish people in the Old Testament that have yet to be fulfilled.

There are over 200 prophecies about the second coming of Jesus that have not been fulfilled, and to ignore the Old Testament as merely historical or symbolic renders these prophecies incomplete.

Location of events

From Genesis to Revelation, the whole story of the Bible revolves around the nation of Israel.

It should therefore come as no surprise that we look to a future third Jewish temple to fulfil the prophecy of Daniel 9 verse 27, which says that the antichrist will put an end to sacrifices and offerings, and will set up an abomination that causes desolation at the temple. Jesus adds to this, the instruction, "Let those who are in Judea flee to the desert".

Traditionally, the church has been taught that the antichrist will arise from a revived Roman empire, therefore many have their eyes on the European Union. However, there is no direct mention of Europe either by Daniel or the book of Revelation. Another idea which is fast gaining momentum is that the antichrist will arise from the Middle East. This should not surprise us, as Jerusalem is coveted by those in the Middle East, not Europe.

Again, the area of the Middle East comes into focus when Revelation 9 verse 14 makes it clear that the sixth trumpet event releases angels who have been bound at the River Euphrates, which runs through Turkey, Syria and Iraq.

Revelation 11 tells us that the two witnesses will be killed in the city where our Lord was crucified, Jerusalem.

Revelation 12 tell us that the woman, who we believe to be Israel, is pursued by the dragon. Revelation 13 tells us that the beast is given power to wage war against God's holy people, Israel.

Revelation 16 verse 12 tells us that the River Euphrates is again the subject of the narrative, as it dries up to make way for the Kings of the East. The battle of Armageddon most likely takes place just north of Jerusalem.

Finally, pointing to the Millennium rule of Christ, the angel Gabriel tells Mary that Jesus will be given the throne of David and will rule over the house of Jacob. Therefore, it is clear that the events of the Tribulation, and the Millennium Reign, are centred on the nation of Israel.

That is not to say that the rest of the world will not be impacted. The majority of the seal, trumpet and bowl events are not tied to any one location. Revelation 13 tells us that the beast will be given authority over every nation, tribe and tongue. Luke 21 tells us that the nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and the tossing of the sea.

So to conclude, the end times story begins and ends with Israel, but it will shake the whole world. We must not let replacement theology write Israel out of the story, or we may miss some essential details and clues to the unfolding of the tribulation period.

Symbols in the book of Revelation

Many stay away from the book of Revelation due to the amount of symbols used in this book.

The key to understanding any type of dream, vision or prophetic scripture is to find the most important elements first and focus on them, this way you won't get lost with all the smaller symbols.

For example, there are 10 key symbols in the book of Revelation to focus on, these symbols are either explained in the book or are interpreted by other passages of the bible. Understanding these symbols will help you make sense of the book of Revelation.

These are the main symbols of the story line to focus on.

The dragon

The rider on the white horse of Revelation 6.

The woman clothed with the sun, the moon and 12 stars.

The beast with ten horns and seven heads.

The second beast who performs great signs.

The image of the beast.

The mark of the beast.

The two witnesses.

The 144,000.

Babylon the Harlot, the mother of prostitutes.

These symbols will be discussed in the subsequent sessions of this course.

The Timeline Of The Book Of Revelation.

It is possible to get confused about the sequence of events in the book of Revelation because some chapters do not follow a chronological sequence. This is an overview so you can see how it flows.

Chapters 1 to 5. The vision of the throne room, and 7 letters to the churches.

Chapters 6 to 11. Sequential timeline of the seal and trumpet judgement events.

Chapter 12 and 13. Background Information about the antichrist and false prophet.

Chapters 14 to 16. Sequential timeline of the great harvest and the bowl judgement events.

Chapter 17 to 18. Background Information about Babylon the Great.

Chapters 19 to 22. Sequential timeline covering the return of Christ, the battle of Armageddon, the Millennium, Judgement day, the new heaven and new earth, and the new Jerusalem.

There Are Various Timeline Plans For The Seals, Trumpets And Bowls.

The book of Revelation teaches clearly that the 7 seal judgements will happen before the 7 trumpet judgements which will in turn happen before the 7 bowl judgements. But because the sixth seal event, the seventh trumpet event, and the seventh bowl event, all appear to refer to the day of the Lord's return, bible scholars have taught various alternatives to the straightforward pattern of events. But the order is not something we should be dogmatic about and may vary.

However, if we keep to the sequence as laid out in the bible, we can conclude that the references to the day of the Lord at each apparent final event, are simply looking forward to that final day as it fast approaches. For instance, in chapter 1 verse 7, John says, "Look, he is coming with the clouds". This is before the timeline of judgement events begin. But nobody should therefore assume that the Lord returns in chapter 1 verse 7. Instead, it is simply looking forward to that soon approaching day.

In conclusion this 10 week study will take the following view points.

- We will use an Israel-centric approach to understand the geographical and prophetic context of end-time events.
- We will interpret Revelation in light of the Old Testament prophecies, emphasizing God's unbroken covenants with Israel.
- We will remain cautious about adding interpretations and instead let the Bible speak for itself, focusing on preparedness and understanding.
- We will take the Bible as literally as possible and avoid unnecessary symbolism.
- We will adopt a Post-Tribulation viewpoint, believing that the church will be present during the tribulation period.

- We believe God has a special purpose for the church in the tribulation days to reach the lost.
- The antichrist will be a person who arises to become the worst tyrant the world has known.
- And finally there is Joy and Peace to be gained in knowing Jesus is coming back and will reign in Jerusalem for 1000 years.

The Story Told As An Overview

During this study of the Book of Revelation, we aim to let the bible speak for itself, showing that the most likely interpretation is of a future tribulation period leading up to Jesus's return. We want to show that there are prophecies in the Old Testament that speak of these end times.

We also want to show that the end times tribulation period has a divine purpose, to bring as many as possible to repentance. As an introduction, we will now summarize the storyline followed in our study.

The Story Line

The book of Revelation is a vision given to John the apostle on the island of Patmos, that begins with an initial meeting, the letters addressed to the 7 churches in Asia Minor and the throne room vision.

Following this, the book of Revelation describes the events on earth following the opening of the 7 seals. These events begin with the rise of the antichrist, and continue with the results of his tyranny. These include a huge rise in war and killing, economic collapse, famine and disease, which altogether kill a quarter of the world's population.

To complete the backdrop, the book of Revelation also gives us information about the antichrist and the false prophet, and the infamous mark of the beast. Also part of the backdrop to all the events is the Jewish Temple, which will enable sacrifices to be made, and the two witnesses who will preach to the world from Jerusalem. The final piece in the jigsaw is the role of Babylon the Harlot, who will team up with the antichrist, and may very well be the system from which the false prophet arises.

What is no secret, is that the antichrist will persecute Christians worldwide. His agenda is not limited to Israel, and Jesus made it clear that there will be great persecution and a great falling away.

Following the seals, there are 7 trumpets blown, each one heralding catastrophic events that are cosmic in nature. Most of these events come out of the sky, and are not the direct result of the antichrist tyranny. The main result of the trumpet events is that the environment of our planet is destroyed.

Following the trumpets, the 7 bowls are poured out on earth, which bring torment and pain to the remaining population, ending with an earthquake so severe that mountains are flattened and islands removed.

Jesus returns after the bowl judgements, to defeat the antichrist armies who are gathered in the Valley of Megiddo, the antichrist and false prophet are thrown alive into the lake of fire, the devil is locked up in a bottomless pit, and Jesus begins his Millennium rule.

During the Millennium rule, the nation of Israel will be dominant, and the world will know peace and prosperity like never before. As king, Jesus will bring justice to the poor, he will end all oppression and wars, and everyone world wide will benefit under his rule.

At the end of this period, the devil will be released for one final assault, testing the hearts and minds of those living on earth. Those people deceived by the devil at this time will gather around Jerusalem, but God himself will intervene with fire.

At the end of the Millennial period, we also have judgement day, in which all those who have died without Christ, and all the nations of the earth will be judged.

Finally, the earth will be destroyed, and a new earth created. The New Jerusalem will then descend out of Heaven, and for eternity God's dwelling will be with man.

What Do You Think?

Regarding the big picture, which of these interpretations have you been exposed to?

Taking the bible at face value which interpretation do you think is correct? (preterist, historicist, symbolic, futurist)

Regarding the rapture, if pre-tribbers are wrong what do you think they experience in the tribulation period?

Regarding the Millennium, can you conceive that Jesus will return to earth to reign for 1,000 years?

How does this information in this session challenge your faith?