

*The Bridge Church Presents:*

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AN INTRODUCTION  
TO  
THE BOOK OF  
REVELATION

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Including Reading Guide

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# Revelation Intro

As we begin our study of the book of Revelation, we realize this book is one that has historically caused a lot of confusion for many people. This isn't helped by the variety of (often weird) interpretations that Bible teachers have given to the book. The writer GK Chesterton once noted that, "Though St. John the Evangelist saw many strange monsters in his vision, he saw no creature so wild as one of his own commentators." In order to help give you clarity as we study the book together, we have compiled this introduction.

# Key Background Information

## Author

Revelation 1:1 identifies the author as “John.” From the earliest days of the church, this John was identified as John the apostle of Jesus, who also wrote the books of John and 1-3 John in the Bible. It is possible that the John who wrote Revelation could have been another John who was a key leader in the early church, and some people have suggested that this is the case, but we don’t know of any other Johns who were key leaders in the early church. The fact that John the author of Revelation gives no other identifiers to help clarify who he is seems to be evidence that he would have been quite well known to the people he was writing to. In light of this, it was most likely John the apostle of Jesus who wrote the book of Revelation, although it could have been another John.

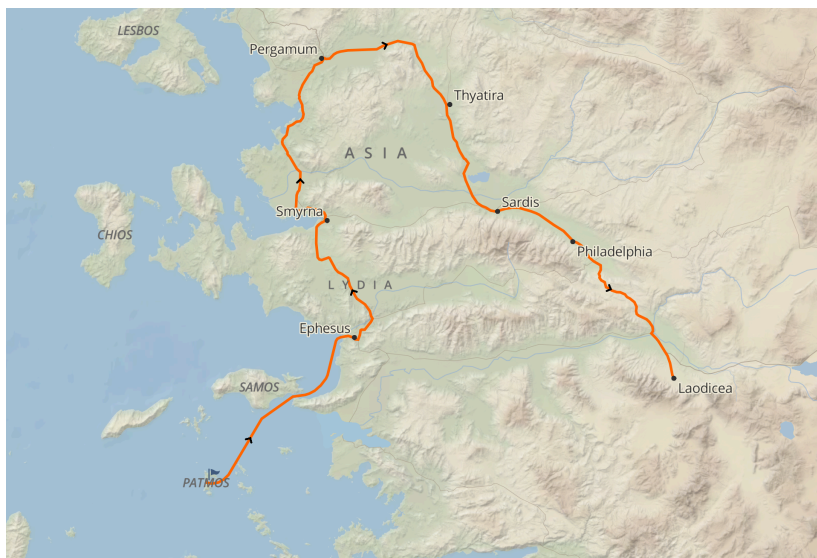
## Date

There is disagreement among scholars about when Revelation was written. Most scholars argue that it was written in the 90’s AD, but some argue for a date in the 60’s. During both of these periods of time, the church was facing persecution from the Roman government and Christians would have been tempted to turn away from their faith in order to make life easier for themselves.

## Recipients

The book of Revelation is written as a letter to “the seven churches that are in Asia” (1:4). Asia in Bible times is modern-day Turkey. The seven churches were located in

the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, all of which are in modern-day Turkey. These churches would have been geographically near the island of Patmos where John was in exile (1:9). The book was then preserved by these churches and passed on to other churches so they could be encouraged and strengthened by it.



These were not the only seven churches in this geographical area. The fact that John chose only seven churches in this area to address and that seven tends to be a symbol of wholeness or completion throughout the book of Revelation points to the fact that these seven churches are probably meant to stand as representatives of all churches throughout history, despite the fact that they were also real, historical churches in that specific time and place.

## Purpose

Again and again, John says that the book of Revelation is written to help Christians endure, overcome, and conquer in their faith (1:9; 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 10, 12, 21; 12:11; 13:10; 14:12; 15:2; 21:7). It accomplishes this goal by giving Christians a glimpse into God's heavenly realities so Christians can have God's perspective as they face the difficulties of life in this world. The book reminds Christians that God is on the throne, and He will have the victory in all of history, so they want to be on His side, no matter what it may cost them to follow Him today.

## Genre

Many disagreements about the book of Revelation stem from interpreters disagreeing about what genre of writing it is. According to the book of Revelation itself, it is a combination of three different types of writing, and each of those genres shapes how we are to interpret it.

1. **Epistle** — An epistle is a letter. We see in Rev. 1:4 that Revelation is a letter: “John to the seven churches that are in Asia...” This means that on one level, we read Revelation like we would read Romans, Galatians, or any of the other letters in the New Testament. It was written by a specific individual person to a specific group of people that were going through a specific set of circumstances, and it was written to challenge, strengthen, and encourage them as they went through those circumstances. This shapes our interpretation of Revelation. It means that whatever Revelation is talking about, it must be saying something that its original audience would

understand and would be encouraged and challenged by. The clearer our understanding of those original churches and the circumstances they were facing, the more connections we'll be able to make between the teaching of Revelation and their lives. The more clearly we understand what it was saying to them, the more clearly we'll understand what it means for us. The book of Revelation won't be saying something to us today that it wasn't saying to its original recipients. The truths that it speaks to us will align with what it has always said from the beginning. As pastor Matt Chandler says, "It is not written *to* us, but it is written *for* us."

2. **Prophecy** — Revelation 1:3 identifies the book as prophecy: "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this *prophecy*." Prophecy is a genre that occurs a lot in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament prophetic books (Isaiah - Malachi). Biblical prophecy sometimes tells what will happen in future events, but more often it tells God's reality and perspective on events that are happening at the time the prophecy is given. It's a "peek behind the curtain" into the way God sees the world so we can learn to live in line with the way He sees reality. This means that although Revelation does speak about some events which will happen in the future, we should expect that a large amount of the book is addressing events that were happening at the time it was written - the time between Jesus' first and second comings - which is also the period of time we live in today. It is not just a book about the future, it is a book about *right now*.

3. **Apocalyptic** — Apocalyptic is a genre which started in Jewish literature a couple centuries before Jesus was born. In apocalyptic, writers give surveys of how God has worked with and for people throughout history, and they project those stories forward to the point where God’s kingdom invades our world. Writers of apocalyptic literature typically expect God’s kingdom to invade our world very soon.<sup>1</sup> We see that Revelation is apocalyptic in the very first word of the book. The word translated as “The Revelation” in English is the Greek word “*apokalupsis*,” which is where we get the English word “apocalypse.” Apocalyptic is known for extensive use of symbolism. Things such as numbers and colors in apocalyptic are often intended to be interpreted symbolically, not literally. Scholars debate to what extent these details are meant to be seen as literal or symbolic in Revelation. Although there are occasional passages in the Bible outside the book of Revelation that incorporate the apocalyptic genre, this is probably the genre that the average Christian has the least exposure to out of the three genres in Revelation. In light of this, the apocalyptic aspects of Revelation will probably be the ones that are hardest for the average Christian to understand and respond to.

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, [\*An Introduction to the New Testament\*](#), Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 714.



# Outline

Rev. 1	Introduction
Rev. 2-3	Letters to seven churches
Rev. 4-5	Vision of worship around God's throne
Rev. 6-16	History and Divine judgment
	A. 7 seals and sealing of God's people (ch. 6-8a) B. 7 trumpets and the witness of God's people (ch. 8b-11) C. 7 symbols (ch. 12-14) D. 7 Bowls (ch. 15-16)
Rev. 17-21	Final tale of 2 cities
	A. Fall of Babylon (ch. 17-18) B. Final battle, victory, and judgment (ch. 19-20) C. New Jerusalem (ch. 21-22)

# Keys for Reading Revelation

Here are a few tips for helping you understand and make sense of things as you read the book of Revelation:

## Recapitulation

In today's world, we are used to reading books chronologically. We expect that as we turn to the next page, time is moving forward in the world of the book, and we expect that if that's not the case, the author will inform us of this fact. Because of this, it is natural for us to approach Revelation expecting it to progress chronologically.

In addition to our natural expectation that books will progress chronologically, many Bible teachers teach that the book of Revelation is to be read chronologically. They would say from the end of the letters in chapter 3, the rest of the book (chapters 4-22) happens with one event following another along a timeline leading up to the return of Jesus and the end of the world as we know it.

However, a closer look at the book of Revelation reveals that this is most likely not how the book is intended to be read. Instead, the book of Revelation incorporates what's called "recapitulation." Recapitulation means it is repeating, restating, or reinforcing the same ideas and/or events over and over.

One clear place to see recapitulation at work in the book of Revelation is to look for "decreation language," the type of language used to show the world as we know it is being destroyed. If Revelation is meant to be read

chronologically, we would expect that this language would only appear at the end of the book. However, we actually find this language throughout the book, indicating that the timeline of the book is constantly advancing to the point of Christ's return, then rewinding to address the same period of time again, but from a different angle:

- **Revelation 6:12-17:** When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, <sup>13</sup> and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. <sup>14</sup> The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. <sup>15</sup> Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, <sup>16</sup> calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, <sup>17</sup> for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"
- **Revelation 11:15-19:** Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." <sup>16</sup> And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, <sup>17</sup> saying, "We give thanks to you, Lord God

Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. <sup>18</sup> The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.” <sup>19</sup> Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

- **Revelation 16:17-20:** The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” <sup>18</sup> And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. <sup>19</sup> The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. <sup>20</sup> And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found.
- **Revelation 19:19-21:** And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. <sup>20</sup> And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These

two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. <sup>21</sup> And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

- **Revelation 20:11-15:** Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. <sup>13</sup> And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. <sup>14</sup> Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup> And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

The use of recapitulation points to the fact that Revelation is intended to be read in cycles rather than in a straight line. Each cycle is talking about the same general period of time as the previous cycles, but each cycle goes into greater depth than the previous one(s). This means as we discuss the book of Revelation, it's best to talk and think about what John sees next, since the book is a series of visions, rather than what *happens* next, since sometimes as we move forward from one

vision to the next and one page to another, we're actually moving backward chronologically.

## Symbolic Imagery

Some people insist that we must read the Bible literally. They claim that to do anything less is to treat the Bible as less than God's word. They claim that unless the Bible explicitly says something is a symbol, we should not expect it to be a symbol.

However, the fact is that God has revealed Himself to us through literature. And just as with all literature, we must follow the rules of the genre that Biblical literature is written in if we want to interpret it properly. For someone to insist that a poem must be interpreted literally in order to be read properly would actually rob the poem of everything that makes it a *poem*.

The key to reading well isn't reading literally, but rather reading *literarily*: reading whatever we're reading according to the rules of the genre it's written in. So if God chose to reveal the book of Revelation in a genre that typically incorporates large amounts of symbolism, which He did, we should expect to find large amounts of symbolism in the book.

Everyone agrees that the book of Revelation incorporates symbols. Even the interpreters who insist that the book must be read completely literally can't escape the fact that the book uses symbolism. The only question is: To what extent are colors, images, numbers, and periods of time in the book meant to be taken literally or symbolically? If you are able to step outside of trying to find a literal fulfillment for each image and

instead look at many of them symbolically, patterns and themes begin to emerge that bring clarity to the overall message of the book.

## Old Testament Allusions

The book of Revelation never quotes the Old Testament, but it references the Old Testament more than all the other books of the New Testament combined.<sup>2</sup>

Depending on which scholar is doing the calculating and what their criteria is for counting something as an Old Testament reference, scholars find anywhere from 300 to 1,000+ Old Testament references in the book of Revelation.

John clearly had a such a deep understanding of the Old Testament that he viewed the world through its lens. The Old Testament's story of the world shaped John's view of the world, and that comes through clearly in his writing. In light of that, it is almost impossible to understand the book of Revelation unless you have a deep understanding of the Old Testament.

## The Plain Things are the Main Things

While there are many elements in the interpretation of the book of Revelation that faithful Christians who love Jesus disagree on, all Christians can agree on the most important parts of the book. These include:

- The reality that God wins the ultimate victory over sin, death, and every form of evil

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<sup>2</sup> G. K. Beale and David H. Campbell, [\*Revelation: A Shorter Commentary\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 17.

- God's people are rewarded and honored for their enduring faith in Jesus
- God's people will be with God forever in the New Heavens and New Earth
- God judges sin, and there are real consequences for rebellion against Him
- No matter what is happening on earth or how hard things get, God is always on the throne

With all the other areas of contention that are up for debate in interpreting the book of Revelation, it is helpful to keep these key truths in mind and seek unity in these main truths of the book.



# When Do the Events of Revelation Happen?

Over the years, there have been five main views on when the events of the book of Revelation take place.

## Past (Preterist View)

The preterist view of the book of Revelation sees the descriptions of judgment in the book as fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and/or the fall of the Roman Empire. A strength of this view is that it connects the events of the book to circumstances that applied directly to the original recipients of the book. A weakness of this view is that people who hold this view often have to adopt strange views about Christ's return, such as saying that it already happened or that it won't happen at all, in order to fit the book's teaching into their proposed timeline for the book.

## Future (Futurist View)

The futurist view of the book of Revelation believes that there will be a literal, one-to-one fulfillment of each event prophesied in the book of Revelation at some point in the future during a literal seven year period of tribulation. Due to the extreme and cataclysmic nature of many of the prophecies in the book and futurists' expectation of literal fulfillments of each event, futurist interpreters typically say that nothing this extreme has happened yet in world history, and therefore everything prophesied in the book is still to come in the future. A strength of this view is that it aims to take God's word seriously by looking for literal fulfillment of His word. A weakness of

this view is that it can tend to view the book in a way that would have lacked meaning for the original recipients of the book.

### **Present (Historicist View)**

Like futurists, historicists look for a literal, one-to-one fulfillment of each event prophesied in Revelation. However, historicists see the events of Revelation taking place over the course of history rather than being constrained to a literal seven year period in the future. Therefore, historicist interpreters look through all of history from the time of Jesus to today and try to find fulfillments of the prophecies in Revelation that have happened in that timeframe. A strength of this view is that it sees the book of Revelation as applicable to the church in every period of time between the first and second comings of Christ. A weakness of this view is that pretty much any historicist interpreter tends to see him- or herself as being at or near the end of the process of judgment in the book and right on the verge of Christ's return, and that has been the case ever since this view became popular in the 1500's. Because of this, historicist interpreters from one time period to another typically disagree on what exact world events correspond to which prophecies from the book of Revelation.

### **Present (Idealist View)**

The idealist view sees the visions and prophecies of Revelation as referring to patterns of events that repeat in history between the first and second comings of Jesus rather than referring to specific individual events. So, for example, according to idealists, the fourth horseman (Rev. 6:7-8) doesn't correspond to a specific individual

person or a specific war, but rather to the fact that wars (on a smaller or sporadic scale, since they only affect a quarter of the earth) will be characteristic of the time between Christ's first and second coming. Because Idealists see the book as referring to general patterns of events rather than specific individual events, they don't expect that the events will play out chronologically, one after another. Instead, they expect the types of events described in Revelation to happen repeatedly until Jesus returns. A strength of this view is that it sees the entire book of Revelation as applicable to the entire time between Jesus' first and second comings. A weakness of this view is that the refusal to connect the prophecies of Revelation with specific events can leave their understanding of the book vague and imprecise.

### **Combination (Eclectic View)**

The eclectic view aims to take the strengths of each of the other views and incorporate them into a holistic understanding of the book of Revelation. This view recognizes that certain parts of the book seem to refer quite clearly to people and places in the Roman Empire, and recognizes the implications of those references for the original readers. However, it also recognizes that the teaching of the book continues to play out beyond the first centuries of the church's life and into the future. The eclectic view is typically willing to identify specific individuals or events as partial fulfillments of the prophecies of Revelation, but it also expects others specific individuals and events to continue fulfilling those same prophecies, maybe even on a fuller level.

# What about the Millennium?

Revelation 20:1-6 speaks about a time when Satan will be bound for a thousand years, often referred to as “the millennium.” During that time, those who have trusted in Jesus reign with Him for a thousand years. There has been debate throughout history about what exactly this passage is talking about and what the millennium will look like. There are three main views that interpreters tend to take in interpreting the passage. The name of each view comes from when the return of Christ happens in relation to the millennium within that view:

## Postmillennial

The postmillennial view says that Christ returns after (“post”) the millennium. In this view, the tribulation and judgment of the book of Revelation refer to a set period of time in history. Once the time of judgment is completed, the millennium begins. The millennium is a time of human flourishing and the advancement of the gospel as God’s kingdom grows on earth. Once this time of flourishing has reached its peak, Christ returns and the fullness of God’s kingdom reigns forever. Events that have been put forward by postmillennial interpreters as the moment when the judgment ends and the millennium begins include the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the fall of the Roman Empire, the settling of America by Europeans (seriously!), and more. Postmillennial interpreters disagree among themselves on whether the millennium is a literal 1,000 year long period of time, or whether the length of time is meant symbolically. A strength of this view is that it is a hope-filled view that believes strongly that God is at work in the world today for good. A

critique of the view is that postmillennial interpreters typically tend to see themselves as living in the time of the millennium after God's judgment has ended. However, if we are now in the millennium and the time of tribulation and judgment is ended, the postmillennial view is not well-equipped to explain why evil is still so prevalent in our world today.

## Premillennial

The premillennial view says that Christ returns before ("pre") the millennium. There are two main types of premillennial views. Both of them believe that the tribulation of the book of Revelation will take place sometime in the present or future before Christ returns, and then Christ's return will begin the millennium, a literal 1,000 year long period of time where Christ and His followers reign on this earth. After the millennium, God will execute the final judgment on His enemies and bring the New Heavens and New Earth, where God and His people will live together for eternity.

- The "dispensational premillennial" view sees the return of Christ as being split into two parts, with the first part being a secret return where He takes all Christians to heaven so they can avoid the time of judgment, which will last for a literal seven year period of time. At the end of the seven years, dispensational premillennialists believe Christ will return publicly, bring an end to the tribulation, and usher in the millennium.
- "Historic premillennialists" believe that the church will remain on earth throughout the tribulation and that Christ's return will be a single, unified event that ends the tribulation and begins the millennium.

A strength of the premillennial view is that it aims to take God's word seriously by taking it literally. A critique of this view is that it doesn't adequately account for the symbolism of the book of Revelation or the recapitulation incorporated throughout the book.

## **Amillennial**

The amillennial view says that there isn't a literal millennium, but rather the millennium is a symbolic picture of the fact that God's kingdom is advancing on earth between Jesus' first and second comings as Christ rules over the world from heaven. In the amillennial view, the tribulation and the millennium don't take place during separate periods of time, but rather they are both happening throughout history side by side, simultaneously. This means the whole period of time from Jesus' birth to the second coming of Jesus is a time where God's kingdom is advancing and spreading on the earth (the millennium) while at the same time God's people are facing increased opposition from the world because of their faith and the world is facing God's judgment for their sin (the tribulation). A strength of this view is that it matches the day-to-day experience of the church, the fact that we live in a world where God's kingdom is simultaneously advancing and at the same time facing increased opposition. A critique of this view is that it requires a break in the timeline of events between Revelation 19:21 and 20:1, which many interpreters claim isn't there.

## **Does it matter which view we hold?**

On one level, yes. Having wrong views of the millennium can lead us to living in ways that harm others. One clear example of this is the American belief of "Manifest

Destiny” in the 1800’s. Manifest Destiny was a belief that said the USA had a duty to expand its influence and beliefs across all of North America, and it was used to justify the forced removal of Native Americans from their homes and invasions of territories that belonged to other nations.<sup>3</sup> This belief grew out of the popular postmillennial belief that the millennium, the kingdom of God on earth, was started when the Europeans settled in America and formed it into a new nation. Since many Americans equated the USA with the millennial kingdom of God on earth, it became easy for Americans to justify brutalizing others in the belief that they were serving God. They actually believed that by oppressing others they were doing good to them, because they were bringing them into God’s kingdom. Clearly, any millennial view that leads us to mistreat others in the attempt to serve God is something we should avoid.

However, on another level, the question of the millennium is one that is not the most essential question for us to get right today. The book of Revelation is clear that the reason it is written is to equip us to endure in our faith and live faithfully for God during our time on earth, and that is something we can do regardless of whether the millennium is already here or is coming in the future.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.history.com/topics/westward-expansion/manifest-destiny>

# What about the Rapture?

One belief that has become popular in recent years in regard to the book of Revelation is “the rapture.” The rapture is a secret return of Jesus where He takes His followers away from the earth and into heaven before the great tribulation begins so they can avoid the time of suffering on earth. Due to the popularity of books and resources teaching this view, such as the *Left Behind* series of books, it is common for people to assume that the rapture is clearly taught in the book of Revelation and the rest of the Bible. However, out of all the interpretations of Revelation in existence, the dispensational premillennialist view is the only one that believes in a secret rapture of the church. All other views see the return of Christ as a unified event where Christ returns to earth once for all.

A deeper study of the rapture gives some serious reasons to rethink whether it is truly taught in Revelation or the rest of the Bible. The idea the the church would be raptured before the great tribulation never existed before the year 1833. While this in itself doesn’t guarantee that the view is wrong, it does raise questions of why nobody had ever discovered this “clear” teaching of the text over the course of 1,800 years of church history.

There are several key passages that people point to in order to argue that the rapture is supported biblically, however a deeper study of these passages shows that other interpretations make better sense of the passages



and point away from the idea of a pre-tribulation rapture.<sup>4</sup> Among these passages are:

**Matthew 24:40-41 (parallel in Luke 17:34-35) – Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.**

People who argue for a pre-tribulation rapture typically argue that these verses are showing the rapture occurring. Two people are together, one is taken away, and the other is left behind. That’s exactly what happens in the rapture, right? However, in the context of the passage, Jesus is comparing the situation to Noah’s flood, a time when the wicked people of the earth were “taken” by the flood in judgment, while Noah and his family were “left” on the earth.

The Luke version of the passage includes a follow-up question from the disciples that further reinforces this reading of the passage. The disciples ask, “Where, Lord?” and Jesus tells them, “Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.” The question “Where?” only makes sense in the context of the one who is taken away, since Jesus has just told them where both people are at the start of his teaching. The disciples don’t need to ask where the one who is left behind is,

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<sup>4</sup> This list of verses and some of the responses is taken from Craig L. Blomberg, [“The Posttribulationism of the New Testament: Leaving ‘Left Behind’ Behind,”](#) in *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to “Left Behind” Eschatology*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 78-83.

since that person is in the same place they were when they started. The disciples are curious where the person who is taken away went, and Jesus' response is that it is a place of death, where corpses are, clearly NOT heaven.

This passage does not support belief in the rapture, because in this passage, you want to be the one who is left behind, not the one who is taken, which is the exact opposite of the teaching on the rapture.

**1 Thessalonians 4:17 — Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.**

This is the only passage in the Bible that refers to believers being “caught up” to meet the Lord in the air.<sup>5</sup> In light of that, it is arguably the most important verse in the entire Bible for arguing that the rapture is a biblical teaching. However, the Greek word translated “meet” in this verse is *apantēsis*, which is a technical term referring to a practice in the Roman world where cities would greet important visitors.<sup>6</sup> Theologian NT Wright explains the practice in more depth:

When the emperor visited a colony or province, the citizens of the country would go to meet him at some

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>6</sup> Erik Peterson, “[Ἀπάντησις](#),” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 380.

distance from the city. It would be disrespectful to have him actually arrive at the gates as though his subjects couldn't be bothered to greet him properly. When they met him, they wouldn't then stay out in the open country; they would escort him royally into the city itself. When Paul speaks of "meeting" the Lord "in the air," the point is precisely not... that the saved believers would then stay up in the air somewhere, away from earth. The point is that, having gone out to meet their returning Lord, they will escort him royally into his domain, that is, back to the place they have come from.<sup>7</sup>

In its cultural context, this verse isn't about believers escaping the troubles of this world through a rapture, but rather about believers welcoming Jesus to the world when He returns.

**Revelation 3:10 — Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.**

This verse is used to support belief in the rapture because it clearly mentions keeping Christians away from the "hour of trial," the tribulation, that is coming on the earth. However, an examination of a parallel passage shows that the method of "keeping" them is most likely not by removing the believers from the earth. John 17:15 is the only other verse in the New Testament that combines the Greek words translated

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<sup>7</sup> NT Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2008), 132-133.

“keep” and “from” in Rev. 3:10 in the same verse.<sup>8</sup> In John 17:15, Jesus prays, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.” In this verse, Jesus is praying for protection for His people using the same words as Rev. 3:10 uses, but He explicitly prays for God to do this *without* taking His followers out of the world. The reading of Rev. 3:10 that makes the most sense of the context is that God will protect His people while they are still in the world rather than protecting them by removing them from the world.

**Some people also argue that since the word “church” doesn’t appear in the book of Revelation after chapter 3 (except in 22:16, which is a reference to the original churches John is writing to), it means the church isn’t on the earth anymore for the rest of the book, presumably because it has been raptured and gone to heaven.**

However, the term “church” is only used in Revelation to refer to the seven specific local churches Revelation is addressed to, and the fact that these specific churches aren’t mentioned in the rest of the book could explain the absence of the term.<sup>9</sup> Believers clearly are on the earth throughout the rest of the book (see 5:10-11; 7:13-17; 9:4; 13:7, 10; 14:1-5, 12-13; 18:4).

**2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 — Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered**

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<sup>8</sup> Blomberg, 80.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 81.

**together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.**

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2, Paul addresses a concern among some people in the church that they had missed Jesus' return. If Paul believed Jesus' return would involve the rapture to take all Christians to heaven, he could have simply said, "Of course you didn't miss it; you haven't been raptured yet, and neither has anyone else." But Paul doesn't say this. Instead he outlines a series of events that must occur before Jesus returns, indicating that Paul doesn't believe in a pre-tribulation rapture.

One other critique of belief in the rapture is that it tends to carry a hidden assumption that suffering is something God wants Christians to avoid. However, throughout the teaching of the New Testament, that is not the case. God expects His people to suffer and to endure through their suffering in order to grow spiritually and to bear witness for Him (see Matt. 5:10-12; Acts 5:41; 9:16; Rom. 5:3; 8:17-18; 2 Cor. 1:5; and more). As Christians, we are called to expect suffering as we follow Jesus and endure in following Him through our suffering, not to hope we can escape or avoid suffering.

Despite all these critiques, there is at least one positive thing to find in the teaching of the rapture that should be applauded. People who believe in the rapture encourage us to live with an expectation that Jesus could return any moment and always be ready for Him to come back. This is a good and biblical teaching that people who

don't believe in the rapture can sometimes lose sight of,  
but that we all need to be reminded of.

# How to Read Revelation<sup>10</sup>

Read Revelation *worshipfully*. The goal of the book is to lead us to worship Jesus. Look for what in the book draws you to Him, deepens your love for Him, and leads you to worship Him.

Read Revelation *canonically*. The book of Revelation is part of the bigger story of the Bible. It brings the whole story of the Bible to a conclusion. Read it in light of the rest of the Bible it's part of, rather than as an isolated book.

Read Revelation *reflectively*. This is a book that repays multiple readings and deep thinking about its message. Don't skim through it so you can check a box that says you've made it to the end. Think about its images and learn to see them in your day-to-day life. Reflect on its language and metaphors. Don't settle for a surface level understanding, but seek to go deeper.

Read Revelation *communally*. Don't just read it on your own. Read it with other Christians, both Christians who are alive today and Christians who lived in the past. Seek to understand how other people interpret the book. Ask questions and have conversations about it. It's ok to argue (kindly and respectfully) with one another if you disagree on an interpretation. Community helps us clarify what we believe so our theology and understanding of God and His word can be deeper and more accurate.

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<sup>10</sup> These points come from Robert Thune, "Revelation: God Wins" (Omaha, NE: Coram Deo Church, 2011)

Read Revelation *Christologically*. The main point is Jesus. He is the hero of the story, the one on the throne who is making all things new. While other elements of the book may interest us, they are all included for the purpose of pointing us toward Jesus. If the other elements are distracting us from Him, recognize what's happening and turn your focus back to Jesus.



# Weekly Reading Plan

Below is a chart of which passages we plan to preach through during each week of our series. We encourage you to take some time during the week leading up to each sermon to read through the passages that we will preach through that week and think through them. So, for example, the week of Dec. 27-Jan. 2, you would focus on reading Rev. 1-3.

Reading the passage and thinking through these questions in advance can help prepare you to listen to and engage with each week's sermon and to be ready to discuss Revelation with others in the church. There are 5 questions listed here, so one suggestion is to read the week's full passage each day that week, and each day think through one of these questions in light of the passage.

- (Monday) What is happening in this passage? What sticks out to you as especially significant or important in the things that are happening?
- (Tuesday) What about the passage is difficult or confusing to you? If you could ask the author questions about the passage, what would you want to ask him?
- (Wednesday) What other passages of the Bible does this passage remind you of? What connections do you see between the passage in Revelation and those passages?
- (Thursday) Where does the passage lead you to worship Jesus?
- (Friday) How is the passage calling you to respond or live differently in light of the truth in it?

<b>Date</b>	<b>Passage</b>
<b>Jan. 2</b>	Rev. 1-3
<b>Jan. 9</b>	Rev. 4-5
<b>Jan. 16</b>	Rev. 6:1-8:5
<b>Jan. 23</b>	Rev. 8:6-11:19
<b>Jan. 30</b>	Rev. 12-14
<b>Feb. 6</b>	Rev. 15-16
<b>Feb. 13</b>	Rev. 17-18
<b>Feb. 20</b>	Rev. 19-20
<b>Feb. 27</b>	Rev. 21-22