

Overview of Revelation

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- [0:00] Alright everybody, I would love to let us keep talking, but we've got limited time and Revelation is a big book, so we're going to jump in and get started. I'm going to open in prayer.
- Father in heaven, we thank you that you give us the chance to study your word together and to learn what you have to tell us. We pray that you would open our hearts to read your book of Revelation, God, which is particularly challenging for us.
- We pray you'd give us humility, you give us insight and wisdom. Lord, we pray that through the words of Revelation, we would be comforted and we would be exhorted to watchfulness.
- And Father, we lift all this up in the name of your son Jesus, and it's in his name that we pray. Amen. Well, welcome everyone. It's really challenging to try and go over a book like Revelation in just one Sunday school class.
- And so what we're going to do today is we're going to do a quick summary of Revelation, also including just a little bit of historical background.
- [1:06] And then we're going to jump in and talk about how to maybe interpret Revelation, some guiding principles, some general viewpoints, some rules of thumb, things like that. And then hopefully we'll have some time for questions at the end because there's no way we'll be able to cover everything.
- So if you have a burning question about something, ask away during the Q&A.; And if we have to close before that's done, I'll be here afterwards. You can talk to me afterwards. And we'll just go from there.
- So let's begin. A little bit of historical background about Revelation. I've got a map up here of the ancient Near East. And Revelation was seen on a little island called Patmos right around here.
- It was seen by John, a disciple of Jesus, probably 80-something A.D., although you can argue it was in the 60s, like 65, 64 A.D.
- There's a little bit of a debate over that. And John sees this vision. If you've read Revelation, you understand that he's on the island. And he sees this exalted vision of Jesus who presents him a series of visions.
- [2:09] And before all that begins, though, Jesus tells John to write to seven different churches. And that's how the book of Revelation begins, with these seven letters to seven churches.
- And if we go through Revelation, there's various ways we can chart it out. I got a couple different charts. These aren't meant for you to follow in detail. They're just meant so you can see how complicated the book is.
- So if you look at this and you think this is overwhelming, that's kind of the point of the chart, is that it's pretty overwhelming. And what this chart does here is it begins at the beginning of the book and just carries on straight through like this.

This chart is different. It starts up here, and it kind of loops around like this. And in some ways, that's a better diagram. But what I want to do is just walk us through a quick summary of the book of Revelation.

And then we'll talk about how to interpret it. So, like I said, the book begins with this vision of Jesus. John is on Patmos, and he's given seven messages to seven different churches.

[3 : 17] And the first several chapters of Revelation are these messages to these seven churches. That's chapters 1 through 4, 1 through 3.

And then in chapter 4, John is given this kind of exalted vision of a heavenly throne room scene. There's a slain lamb. There's a lot of stuff going on in there.

And then a scroll is presented to the lamb. And no one's able to open the scroll. It's sealed with seven seals. And then as the lamb opens the scroll, there's these visions that pop up throughout the period of these seven seals in chapter 6 through 8.

So you've got seven seals. And these seven seals, the seventh seal is opened, and we get seven trumpets. And we get another series of visions in Revelation chapter 8 through 11.

And then we've got, in chapter 12, things switch around. We've got all these figures that appear. There's a woman, a child, a dragon, an archangel. There's a beast from the sea, a beast from the earth.

[4 : 22] There's a terrible struggle. And then in chapter 14, we see that the Son of Man appears. He has this, like, harvester who's going to harvest the earth.

And then after that, we have seven bowls of wrath, another series of visions. So if we're on this particular chart, the seven seals and the seven trumpets and the seven signs or figures and then the seven bowls in this chart are kind of running in parallel with one another.

And then after the seven bowls, there's this kind of vision of judgment of this mysterious figure called Babylon.

And then there's this final battle with this millennial reign of Jesus, which is very mysterious. And then there's finally the end, where there's this new heavens and a new earth. There's a marriage with the Lamb of God, the church, and the Lamb are married together at the end.

And the closing words of the book, John is told to not seal up the prophecy, to not seal it up. And there's also a warning about adding and taking away from the book.

[5 : 33] Well, if that was overwhelming, that's very understandable. Most people find Revelation confusing and overwhelming and bewildering. And people, when they encounter the text, they often have several questions.

There's actually hundreds of questions people have. We're going to focus on just some of them. So one thing people wonder is they wonder, what's going on here? Like, how do I make sense of Revelation?

What's it? When I start reading it, I feel like I get partway through the book and then I lose the narrative thread. The coherency kind of falls apart. I feel like I'm turned around.

I don't know which direction to look. I don't understand exactly what's happening and how the pieces fit together. But another question people have is they wonder, how allegorical is Revelation anyway?

You've got these demonic locusts. There's dragons. There's an earth beast. A sea beast. There's all this crazy stuff going on. And people wonder, is this meant to be literal or are these symbols or allegories?

[6 : 35] And if they are symbols or allegories, what do they relate to? How are you supposed to understand them? Some other questions people have is, what about the rapture?

In certain Christian circles, the rapture is a doctrine that's a really big deal. The rapture is this idea that Jesus will come and take faithful believers to himself.

And often this occurs before all this bad stuff in Revelation actually goes down. Although not always. It depends on the particular doctrinal flavor we're talking about.

But what about that? What should I believe about that? And what about the millennial reign of Jesus? You might have caught that when I was giving a summary. That at the end, towards the end, there's this millennium where Jesus reigns on earth.

A thousand year period. And that's very controversial in Christian circles about how to interpret that. Is this a literal thousand year physical earthly reign of Jesus? Is this something else?

[7:34] What's going on here? And then finally, what's the purpose of Revelation? Why? Some people, you know, we all have our favorite books. And we all have our least favorite books.

And for many people, Revelation is their least favorite book. I would say it's probably the most polarizing book in the Bible. Because there's a big chunk of people that love it. And there's a big chunk of people that don't like it that much.

Even if they think it's scripture, it just doesn't speak to them as much. And then there's a chunk of people who are kind of just confused by it. So what's the whole purpose of it anyway? What we're going to do in our remaining time is we're going to try to work through these questions.

We're going to spend a lot of time on this one as well. But then we're going to treat these others as we go. So let's start out with this one. What's going on with Revelation? How do I make sense of it?

If you canvas scholars and you canvas church history, it turns out that there's basically four different models for interpreting Revelation.

[8:36] And what I want to do is walk through these models with you. And I'm going to go kind of quick for the sake of time. But that's okay. The point is not to get all the fine points down. It's just to kind of get the highlights.

So one way to interpret Revelation is called the futurist interpretation. And this model treats Revelation as referring to the future.

Where pretty much everything in there after the letters to the seven churches is about what's going to happen in the future shortly before, during, and after Jesus returns.

Sometimes this is very allegorical. Sometimes not. So sometimes the earth beast and the sea beast and the dragon represent something that's going to happen. But sometimes people think there's actually going to be a dragon or a beast or something like that running around.

So that's one model. And I'll chart these out in a little bit. We'll go over them one more time. But a second model is called the preterist model. And this is kind of the opposite.

[9:34] This is, no, Revelation does not refer to the future. Instead, Revelation refers to the past. Revelation talks about, it's an allegorical retelling of the events of the Jewish war in 68 to 70 AD when the Jewish temple was destroyed by the Romans.

And in this view, Revelation was prophecy, but it was written before this event. So when John saw the visions, they were future visions.

But from our perspective, they refer to the past. And Revelation should be read in light of the Jewish war in 68 through 70 AD where all sorts of horrific things happened.

And it was a kind of turning point in biblical and spiritual history because that's when the Jewish temple was destroyed. And that's when Christianity, the Jewish people were scattered.

And when Christians started growing in great numbers. Okay. A third way to interpret Revelation is called the historicist interpretation.

[10:39] And this one believes that Revelation allegorically retells the events of human history. So it kind of views Revelation as encoding what's going to happen to humanity after the death of Jesus, but before he comes, he returns.

So if you read Revelation, you go through it, you can find important human events in there. And everybody's got different views. Every historicist has different views. But things like the rise of the papacy or World War II or the Holocaust, all of that is embedded in Revelation.

And you can see it there as it's retelling us. This view waxes in wings. It's not the most popular view these days, but there have been times where it's been quite popular.

There's one final interpretive model, and this is the idealistic interpretation. And this is the idea that Revelation is allegorical, but it doesn't actually refer to concrete historical events.

It's all allegory that's disconnected with historical happenings. So in other words, when you see depictions of battles or monsters or things like that, these are representative of like the struggle of the soul or the struggle with sin or vice or things like that.

[12:00] And in that sense, you shouldn't read Revelation according to this model by looking for specific fulfillments either in the past or in the future. It's really an allegory about God's drama of saving us and redeeming us from our sins.

So these are the four different general models. I should say that each of these are quite diverse within one another. You'll get folks within each four of these camps that have very different views of how to interpret Revelation.

These are kind of the broad contours and outlines. And if it helps, we can actually chart some of these out. So for instance, if we take the futurist interpretation, this is a chart from the ESV study Bible.

And oh, I see some of you maybe have some of them. That you'll see this is the text of Revelation chapters one through three, the letters chapters four through 19, all that stuff with the beasts and bulls and trumpets, the millennium and then the final judgment and the renewal of all things.

And so what the futurists say is, well, the letters refer to the first century churches that John wrote to. And then we've got church history, which we're in this right now, the ancient church, the medieval church, the Reformation.

[13:10] This is us. Then chapter four through 19 talks about the end times right before Jesus or during Jesus's return. And then futurists often, though not always, believe that this millennium is then a thousand year literal reign of Jesus that happens after the tribulation.

And then you have the final judgment and the renewal of all things. So that's how many, not all, but many futurists would read Revelation.

For instance, some futurists take the millennium as referring to the church age. I'll talk more about that later on. Here's another millennial understanding.

This is called a dispensational understanding, which is a kind of subset of the futurists. So this is pretty much the same letters refer to the first century.

You've got all the crazy stuff refers to the tribulation, but they stick a rapture in here. So believers, Christians are taken up by Jesus before the tribulation.

[14:15] And that's kind of the big hallmark of the dispensationalist view and how it differs from the futurist view. Man, I'm getting overwhelmed by all that.

So the preterist view, as I mentioned, you've got the first century, but then all this stuff is just referring to the Jewish war with Rome. And then you have the partial preterist view, which is a mix where you've got the Jerusalem's fall, the Jewish war with Rome.

But then this stuff refers to church history, things like that. You've got the historicist, where all this stuff is just referring to what we would just call today. Church history.

Everything that happened after Jesus was resurrected up until he returns. This is including us today. And then the idealist school, where everything can kind of just be wrapped up in whatever's happening in the past, future, or in your life right now.

It's all allegorically or applying to non-specific historical events. Well, I don't know about you guys, but this is still pretty overwhelming.

[15 : 26] Most people don't find all this when you just glance at it. While it's helpful, it's interesting to think about, it's still pretty complicated and it's hard to sort out. So what I want to do now is switch gears.

I want to talk about some helpful interpretive notes as you're reading the book of Revelation. Things to think about while you just open up the text and experience it and read it.

Revelation says blessed is the one who reads and hears the words of this prophecy. So as you're reading this, here's some helpful things to think about as you go.

And in this, we'll answer some of those questions that we asked at the beginning. Like, how allegorical is Revelation? Well, one thing to remember when you're reading Revelation is that Revelation itself invites allegorical approaches.

And here's what I mean by this. Revelation will specifically say that something it describes is not literal. It will say this is referring to something else. Here's an example. The seven lampstands that John sees, Revelation says those aren't actually seven lampstands.

[16 : 34] They symbolize seven angels. Or the number 666 in Revelation 13, 18. The text says, actually, this is a cipher.

It's a puzzle referring to some kind of name of the beast that it symbolizes. Or there's the phrase, it's referring to Jerusalem. But instead of the text saying Jerusalem, it says spiritually called Sodom and Egypt.

And it's not actually talking about Sodom and Egypt. It's talking about another city. Or the seven heads of the beast. In Revelation 17, 9, the text is very clear.

Those seven heads represent seven hills on which a city sits. Or here's another one. Linen, the righteous saints are dressed in linen. And Revelation says, actually, that linen represents the righteous deeds of the saints.

And then we got the really big one. In Revelation chapter 1, verse 1, the very beginning, John says that Revelation was signaled, giving through signs to John.

[17 : 39] And that's an important interpretive note. That Revelation claims this was given through signs. And signs point to something else.

So when you ask yourself, how allegorical is Revelation? Well, the answer is, it definitely is allegorical. It doesn't answer if everything is allegorical.

And remember that just because something is allegorical doesn't mean it's not going to be historically fulfilled. There could be many historical or future events that it's simply allegorically describing.

But what this means is as you're going, you can always be asking yourself, okay, is this a sign for something else? And what is it signing me to? What is it pointing me to?

So think of that as you read through the book of Revelation. Here's another helpful interpretive note. Revelation's visions likely have multiple meanings or fulfillments.

[18 : 40] In other words, there's probably more than one thing some of the visions are referring to. Or at least there's a chance there is. Now, what's the evidence for this?

Well, there's a few pieces of evidence for this. One is not biblical. It's not biblical evidence. It's more just observational. It's because, you know, there's lots of stuff in history.

Like if Revelation speaks about kind of a massive persecution of all of God's people, that's actually happened more than once throughout history. There's been massive persecutions under various emperors when all Christian people were ordered to do, were to sacrifice to idols or things like that.

That's happened. You know, the Jewish temple's been destroyed more than once in history. The Jewish people have returned more than once in Jewish history. So there's some kind of historical reasons for thinking that maybe when Revelation is speaking about visions, there could be some multiple meanings or fulfillments behind it.

Maybe not all the visions, but maybe some of them. Here's another reason. If we subscribe to a futurist understanding where all these visions are going to occur in the future, well, most futurists admit that these visions actually were partially fulfilled in 70 AD when Jerusalem was destroyed.

[19:55] So if you're a futurist, you kind of have the multiple fulfillments built in already. On the other hand, if you're a preterist and you think that everything was fulfilled in 70 AD, you still have other issues like other potential fulfillments throughout church history where the Jewish people were apparently being regathered or the temple was going to be rebuilt.

That happened, for instance, in the 370s where this pagan emperor was trying to rebuild the Jewish temple and people were all horrified about it, freaking out. So within each view, there seems to be an invitation for multiple partial fulfillments or multiple fulfillments.

But here's the big one. This is kind of just martial reasons, but the big reason for thinking there might be multiple meanings is that Revelation itself is kind of a multiple fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

Revelation takes Old Testament prophecies and repurposes them and reuses them throughout the entire text. Let me show you an example of this. So in the book of Daniel, Daniel sees all these visions.

He sees the visions of a statue made of many different metals. He sees a series of four beasts, and then he sees another series, and these represent different empires, and they all correspond with one another in a certain way.

[21:18] So you've got the Babylonians and the Medo-Persians and the Greeks, etc. Well, in Revelation, what we see is a new beast. This beast has seven heads, and it's made up of different creatures.

But it seems to be an amalgamation of these four beasts, which together, this one has four heads, so together they have seven heads, and they're a lion and a bear and a leopard, and we see that this beast is being reborn again in Revelation.

So in other words, Revelation suggests that these beasts in Daniel are going to have some kind of other fulfillment in the future. And this happens all throughout Revelation, where the plagues in Exodus are given again, where the day of the Lord is described again and again in the Old Testament.

It's described in Revelation again and again in different imagery. So it's kind of a suggestion that maybe there are multiple ways of interpreting Revelation that are valid.

And what this means is that we don't necessarily have to settle on just one of these interpretations.

[22:33] For instance, it could be that Revelation is referring to all of this in some sense. So in other words, there's scholars and theologians who have thought that what Revelation is describing is kind of like a rising tide where waves are coming in and coming up on the beach, and they go a little farther and they recede, and they go a little farther and they recede, and you're seeing the same pattern happening again and again, but the total fulfillment is not yet.

So you'll see this often. Futurists will talk about how you see this, especially in the futurist interpretation and a little bit in the idealistic interpretation, where you have a belief that there is going to be a concrete future ultimate fulfillment of the visions of Revelation, but there's a lot of stuff that's happened that is kind of partially fulfilling these visions as we go.

We can talk more about that in the Q&A; if you're interested. Okay, we talked about how Revelation invites allegorical approaches. Revelation visions may or likely have multiple meanings or fulfillments.

Here's another reason for thinking that there may be multiple meanings or fulfillments, and it's so important that I wanted to give it its own independent slot here. That's that it appears that Revelation is cyclical.

In other words, it appears that Revelation isn't linear. It's not written beginning to end following one narrative strand. Instead, it loops back on itself and describes the same events again, but in different ways as it's going through the text.

[24:10] This is why when you're reading, you all of a sudden find yourself getting turned around or confused, because if you read it straight through from beginning to end, you'll see that it's quite hard to follow, but if you read it as a series of visions, some of which pertain to the same subject matter that's already been discussed, it helps make a little more sense.

This is how this chart tries to explain this, where it tries to show that some of these visions actually parallel one another and are talking about the same themes, but with different tenor and emphasis throughout.

The big parallel, the one that's the most clear, is the parallel between the seven trumpets and the seven bulls. Seven trumpets are in chapter 8 through 11.

Seven bulls are 15 through 16. And if we line them up in order, we notice something really interesting. So the first trumpet talks about hail and fire and blood cast to the earth. The first bull is poured out on the earth.

The second trumpet, a mountain of fire is cast into the sea. The bull is poured out on the sea and it becomes blood, whereas the mountain of fire turns the sea to blood. So the sea has become blood twice.

[25:25] Three, there's a burning star that falls on the rivers and wells of water, and then the bull is poured out on the rivers and wells of water. A third of the sun and moon and stars are darkened.

This is poured out on the sun. We have this locust plague. The sun is darkened. The kingdom of the beast is darkened. Lucy and the angels have the river Euphrates with a huge army, is the sixth trumpet.

And the sixth bull is the great river Euphrates was made bitter, and a way for the kings of the east was opened. And then finally the seventh says, the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.

It seems like that's the end. That's it. Jesus has come back, but we're only in chapter 11. And then in the seventh bull, it says, it is done.

There's a final judgment upon Babylon with great hailstones. And now we're in Revelation 16. And if you know Revelation, it's still not over yet. There's a lot more to come, but yet it seems like it's ended twice already.

[26 : 34] And so that is this idea that perhaps Revelation is better viewed, instead of as one continuous vision, it's better viewed as a series of visions that John sees.

And that makes Revelation more understandable, makes it more intelligible as you go. So these are helpful interpretive notes. One is Revelation invites allegorical approaches.

One is maybe the visions have multiple meanings. Another is Revelation is cyclical. This pertains to this, by the way, because if Revelation is cyclical, then that means that you have multiple visions of similar events and all things like that.

Here's a fourth thing to keep in mind as you're reading Revelation. When you read Revelation, you should also read it with Paul and with Jesus. They talk about the end times.

Both of them do. In 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Jesus talks about the end times in his famous Olivet Discourse, but he also does a few places elsewhere.

[27 : 38] But I'm thinking specifically Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 17, and 21. And when you take what Paul says, and take what Jesus says, and take what Revelation says, you notice some themes keep coming up.

And I just wanted to chart some of these out. One is that they all talk about many deceivers and wars coming. They all talk about apostasy happening.

And many of them, not all of them, but many of them mention this abomination of desolation, false Christs, false signs, heavenly signs is a big one.

They all mention a last trumpet. They talk about the gathering of the elect, the coming of the Son of Man. A fig tree comes up more than once.

It comes up in Jesus. It comes up in Revelation as well. How no one knows the hour, how there's a mystery here, that even though there are these signs, there's still going to be a mystery that won't be revealed until the moment Jesus comes back.

[28 : 44] How the gospel will be preached to the world. Jesus says that. Revelation says that. It talks about this eagle going forth to preach the gospel to the whole world. Earthquakes, famines, wars are all described, but Jesus is very clear.

The end is not yet. All these things are going to come, but the end is not yet. And then Jesus' return will be like lightning. In other words, it'll be really obvious.

That you won't really need someone to tell you, I think Jesus is way over there. Let's go find him. You'll become naturally aware of it, just like when lightning flashes across the heavens.

So these can provide kind of anchor points for thinking about Revelation. A lot of people haven't realized that Revelation, Paul, and Jesus do cover a lot of the same material and talk about things.

They talk about the same things, but in different ways. Paul's writing a letter. Jesus is preaching his sermon. Revelation is a series of visions, but all three of them, even though they're giving very different formats for their teaching, they all correspond and complement one another.

[29 : 53] Okay. All right. We talked about allegory, Revelation being cyclical, reading Revelation with Paul and Jesus. Let's get into some specifics, and then we'll open it up for questions.

So first of all, what about the millennium in Revelation? Just to recap, in Revelation chapter 20, Jesus reigns for a thousand years on earth, and the saints are raised.

And there's controversy in Christian eschatological circles about what this refers to. Does this refer to a literal millennium reign where Jesus will reign on the earth for a thousand years physically, and then at the end of the millennium, Revelation describes Satan being released again after he's apparently been defeated, and this whole battle happening again?

Or is the millennium an allegorical description of, let's say, the church age? Well, some of the things we observed help us maybe to interpret this.

Remember, Revelation does invite allegory, specifically. Numbers are also allegorical often in Revelation. The number 666 is said to represent something else, and the number 7 comes up quite a lot in Revelation as if it's symbolic of something.

- [31 : 15] So some people take the thousand years as referring to just a long period of time and the resurrection of the saints as not a physical resurrection, but a spiritual resurrection, just like how Paul talks about you are reigning with Christ already in heaven.

You are already reigning. You're already ruling with Christ. Paul says this in Ephesians. And so you could also then add the idea of Revelation being cyclical to be like the millennium is just another vision.

It's another one of the many visions of Revelation that is giving a different perspective on what's happening throughout the church. And in other words, the millennium is not literal.

It's simply an allegorical description of the church age. When Satan is bound, when Christians reign with Christ, are raised with him, but then there will be this period when Satan is released, and that will refer to the end times when the tribulation happens and all that.

So that's one way of taking it. I tend in that direction, but we're not dogmatic about that. You're free to believe whichever flavor you like. But that's one way to think about it.

- [32 : 21] Another one is the rapture. The rapture is, it depends on how you want to define it. Everybody has a different definition of it. But it's the idea broadly that Jesus will come and will take up believers and rescue them.

In that broad sense, the rapture is all over Revelation. Jesus is coming back. He is coming to rescue his saints and to raise them up. Paul talks about how at the last trumpet, those who are dead will rise and then we'll be caught up with Christ in the clouds.

That's very clear in scripture. The debate though is, when is this going to happen? Is it going to happen before a terrible tribulation that's unlike suffering anyone has ever experienced in the whole world, which some people believe?

Or is it going to happen during that? Or is it going to happen after that? And Revelation is clear and scripture is clear that regardless of what we think about when the rapture is going to occur, Christians are never promised to escape from suffering.

Jesus kind of promises the opposite, actually, that you will suffer by following Christ. You must take up your cross. The cross, of course, represents suffering and death.

- [33 : 36] You must take it up. Also, in Revelation, there are some passages that seem to suggest that Christians will suffer some of the things described in Revelation.

There is also a passage that talks about, very specifically, that there will be, Christians will be spared from some of the woes that are coming on the earth.

So these are all things to think about when you are trying to discern the rapture and when it's going to occur. With both of these things and with kind of everything else, those four interpretive models, I think the number one exhortation should be one of humility where we don't actually have certainty about these things.

And that's kind of the point. We're called to be watchful and to wait for Jesus to come. And there's some things that won't be revealed until he comes, but we know enough that they'll help us discern all of that as it's happening.

Okay, finally, what's the purpose of Revelation? Most people will say, well, the purpose of Revelation is to tell us about when Jesus comes back and all the signs that are going to happen before he comes back.

[34:53] Yes, that is part of the purpose of Revelation, but there's a lot of others as well. For instance, Revelation is a warning about God's coming judgment, how he's going to judge sin.

It's also a warning to be watchful, to be prepared about the coming of Jesus, to always keep watch, knowing that he could come when you least expect it.

In fact, Scripture says that, that when people aren't looking for it, that's when he's going to come. Revelation also, though, is exhorting us to be hopeful.

There's an interesting phenomenon. In my dissertation, I tracked the reception of Revelation in the ancient and medieval church. And the ancient and medieval church was kind of like today, where there was a lot of people that loved Revelation, a lot of people, it was polarizing.

There was a lot of people that really loved the book, and there was a lot of people that were confused by it and didn't use it that much. And one thing that was interesting is that the more a particular church was suffering, the more they liked Revelation.

[35:58] The more they found that God's coming judgment, that his vindication, that his promise of wiping every tear away, the more they found that comforting to them.

And the more they looked to Revelation for consolation and to prepare for the return of Christ. And on the contrary, the more a church was rich and established, the less they kind of liked Revelation.

They were kind of confused by it and maybe even threatened by it a little bit. And then, of course, Revelation also talks about signs of the return of Christ.

And I will say, though, that depending on which view you subscribe to, these signs will either be very, very numerous and very explicit and detailed, or they will be more of a general character that are a bit vaguer, depending on which kind of school you subscribe to.

Okay, that's a lot. But we do have time for questions. So if people want to fire away, we'll close probably about 15 minutes. And then if you want to stick around and talk, we can talk too, or we can talk after the service also.

[37:14] Tom, can I just ask a clarifying question? Yes, yes. I think an important point about the symbolic or allegorical reading from Revelation 1.1. Can you just explain a little more, because the ESV doesn't say the signal.

Can you just say a little bit about how you got there from Revelation 1.1? Yeah, so the ESV says the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.

The original Greek, I think, is semeio, which means to signal. And so a literal translation would be the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to signal to his servants the things that must soon take place.

It's the same, it's the verb form of sign, to sign to someone what must take place. So it doesn't inherently, I mean, you can interpret that as more vague as just show, but there is this idea of it's a sign or a symbol that's pointing to something else so that when there is this dragon running around, it helps with the idea that the dragon is pointing to something else.

It's not actually there. You can take it the other way. I mean, you don't have to take it that way, but... Yeah, no, that's really helpful because I was, you know, if we all went and looked at Revelation 1-1, we'd be like, that's not what it says.

[38:33] Come on, Tom. But it is what it says. It does say that he signaled that or he signed it to John. Yeah, thanks, thanks. That's a good clarification. Thanks, yeah. Other thoughts?

I'm going to get cooler pictures up here. Well, a lot of people might be familiar with them, how Lindsay and all of that, so which of those views was that?

Or the combination of those? Okay, so someone jump in if I'm wrong. Hal Lindsay's futurist, right? And I think he's dispensationalist also. Yeah, that's correct. So he thinks that this is all referring to the future, but it's a specific kind of future where...

It's a specific kind of futurist where there is going to be a rapture of believers, but that's going to happen before the tribulation. So before all the terrible stuff, all the believers are taken up, and then he also, I think, believes in a literal millennial reign.

So you could be a futurist and believe that the millennial reign actually is just referring to the church age, and that the rapture does happen, but it's after the tribulation.

[39 : 44] It's after all that suffering, Jesus comes, and that's when he takes up Christians. What's the history of that view? Like, where is that located in...

It's called the pre-tribulation rapture theory. That's a recent view. It's very hard to find it. I can't find it in any ancient Christian writings.

Like when you... Century or 19th? I think it's 19th. 19th. Or 20th. 19th. John Nelson Darby. Yeah. So it's a more recent view.

The other views, if you look at these other models, the futurist and the preterist and the idealistic, you find all throughout church history. So you'll find ancient and medieval and modern scholars and theologians that take these views, and they often mix them together in various ways.

However, the pre-tribulation version of this, the pre-tribulation rapture version of this is a modern phenomenon. This is also more modern.

[40 : 49] And if you think about it, it kind of has to be modern because you need the events to happen before you can say, oh, that's talking about revelation. So, you know, the rise of the papacy or the Holocaust, it's going to take a while before you work that in.

This view also tends to be very Western European-centric. And so you'll find a deep emphasis on the papacy in Rome, which is fine, but you have to remember that there were lots of Christians in Eastern Europe and North Africa and the Middle East and Asia that are kind of just ignored, like they're not really part of the church.

Ivor, sorry. I'm going to ask you I saw a new heaven and a new earth and the first heaven and the first earth that passed away and was no longer any sea.

And it looks to me like they're talking about a new planet. Yes, yes, yes. Yes. And I've been told that's no, but nobody tells me why. Why it's no.

Okay. That's a great question, Ivor. Yeah. So that is, you are putting your finger on a little bit of a debate in theological circles about is God going to renew his creation or is he going to destroy it and make a new one?

[42 : 00] And that particular passage does seem to feel like it's just going to be a brand new one and it's not renewed. There's other passages that suggest differently.

I guess if you were going to say, no, no, no, that's not a total new planet, it's going to be a renewed planet, you would go to the fact that Revelation is very dramatic.

It's dramatizing these allegories and that the sea in Old Testament thought that Revelation picks up on, the sea is often this area of chaos and darkness.

And so when it says there's no sea, it's not saying there's not going to be an ocean or water. It's just saying there's not going to be this chaotic darkness that is always inhabiting our world. Okay.

Kind of like how we would, a better translation would be like the depths or the abyss or something, which for us, you could use the abyss for the depths of the ocean, but it also means something else. Okay. I just have a follow-up.

[42 : 56] Yeah. It says there'll be a new planet. Yep. That would mean a new galaxy, right? Maybe. We'll see. We'll find out. I don't have strong feelings one way or the other.

I mean, we could get there and Jesus could be like, yeah, I renewed it. It's new. Or he could be like, no, it's brand new. I mean, I don't, we'll find out. Okay. I don't. All right. So there's no way. Someone, if someone feels, if you feel, yeah, I don't, Matt.

So it occurs to me that in this, you've used the term allegory and the true literature people among us might be a little struggling. Okay. Because allegory has like clear, here's a person, they correspond to one thing.

Okay. And so I think you're using allegory a little bit more broadly than that. That's great. Yes. And maybe symbolic. Okay, symbolic. Where you're using images to point towards truths, but the images aren't always specific.

And we see in Revelation that these images are actually malleable. And so in chapter one, it might be this. In chapter seven, it might be that. The image of seven eyes doesn't always mean the same thing, but it might.

[44 : 05] Okay. And so I agree for your question about the seas, the question is, is this literally a picture of a recreated physical reality?

Like going back to Genesis one and starting over, God said, let there be a new heavens and a new earth in a physical way. Or is it a symbol of a renewal that God is doing of the earth that he's already created?

And it could be either. So that's where it's not a clear yes or no. Right. But I think that's, and part of the dispensational pre-millennial, I grew up in some of this when I first came to Christ.

It was part of the world that I lived in. And part of what they tend to say, but you've got to take this literally. And part of what I would say is, we are taking it literally in the sense of, this is what the author intended to communicate through a particular way.

Very good. Right? So it's not a heavens and earth. It's not a real beast with seven heads. Because they're using that as imagery, not as there was a literal beast that came out of the sea.

[45 : 14] And so this is where it's just a different language than we're used to reading in the Bible of all places. But then you start looking and you think, well, Daniel writes this way and Zechariah writes this way and Ezekiel writes this way and Isaiah has visions.

And then you get, even when Jesus talks about the future, which I think our futurist positions from a Jesus standpoint, he's also pulling on all this imagery.

So I think we just need to be more comfortable with imagery and how it communicates truth. Thank you, Matt. And just to clarify, whenever, and I think it's a good rule of thumb, whenever someone talks about allegory, I always ask them, what do you mean?

Because it can mean a lot of things and my language maybe was a little squishy. So when I say allegoric, I don't mean that it necessarily is devoid of history or that it's not going to have an actual fulfillment symbol is probably a better, it's probably a better way to describe that.

And that's the word that, it's more similar to the word that Revelation uses, to sign something. Yeah. Off of Matt's point, I think, how would you, when you're reading the Old Testament especially, distinguish what the author is using the apocalyptic imagery versus meant to be interpreted historically, literally, like in the, I think a lot of people have a hard time with allegory because they want to say, well, if you're going to interpret Genesis 1 or 2 allegorically, then you're going to go off the rails, there's not going to be, you know, and I just don't have them, and so there's a lot of fear for an allegorical or apocalyptic way of interpreting scripture.

[46 : 53] But what are some signs that like, when we read like Isaiah or Zechariah, where we can say, you know, this is, maybe I need to just be careful that it's not intended to be read, as Matt said, in a way that's a literal fulfillment rather than some sort of signs, apocalyptic imagery, some, just some guideposts I mean, that's the, yeah.

I'd have to look at individual passages, but the Old Testament can be very challenging in the sense that the Old Testament prophets frequently talk about, for instance, the day of the Lord, the day of the Lord is coming, the day of the Lord is coming, but when you really drill down, it seems sometimes like this day of the Lord means different things, and so sometimes it does seem to be talking about this ultimate judgment that's going to happen, but other times it seems to be talking about more of a particular judgment that's going to happen in history, or sometimes even an individual judgment, like you're going to meet your maker one day, or, so an individual judgment would be, you're going to meet your maker one day, a particular one would be, you know, this town that I'm prophesying against or city is going to be conquered at some point, so it's general, but it's not an ultimate, it's not an ultimate judgment when Christ returns, but then sometimes it is talking about an ultimate judgment, and I don't know how, that's the rub there, that's, it's hard to sometimes figure out which one of those three or all of those three is being referred to.

Babylon is a great example of this. Babylon is prophesied against many times in the Bible, but we see Babylon again in Revelation where it symbolizes, seems to symbolize sort of this world system of wickedness, or you could think of it more particular where it's symbolizing an actual empire that will come.

Some people go further and they say, no, it symbolized Rome in 70 AD, but if you want to stretch it even more, I mean, Babylon goes way back to the Tower of Babel before Nebuchadnezzar, and I mean, it's this, this image that goes all throughout the beginning and end of scripture, and which, like, when you focus on a particular passage with Babylon and then you ask, well, what is this referring to specifically?

It might have multiple, multiple reference that it's referring to the historical Babylon led by Nebuchadnezzar that was going to be judged by the Persians back in 600 BC, but then Babylon becomes a reimage of the Roman Empire, but then also a reimage of any wicked empire, and so it, that's how scripture reuses that imagery, but it's, there's no simple, I can't come up with a simple, simple guy like, I was going to say, there are times when you're reading one of these apocalyptic passages and you're like, like, it's so strange, and it's not, like, so much of the Bible is historical and it gives you, like, this king was reigning and this is happening in this city, and there are a lot of specifics like that without the imagery, history, and you know you're on pretty firm ground that this is history, and then you get to something like

[50:16] Revelation, and you're like, well, maybe it's history, but this is really weird, like, there's a sense of, there's a sense where you can kind of tell, and then there are things like early chapters of Genesis, it doesn't sound like apocalyptic literature, there are white horses and beasts and sort of outrageous images, but it's a little, it's a little like that, so you can, so it's, I don't want to say it's debatable, but you'll have different opinions about something like that, but there are some things, I feel like there's a lot of the Bible that's, it's pretty clear when we're reading history, and it's, I mean, to me, the more you read this apocalyptic stuff and compare it to other parts of the Bible, you go, yeah, this is a different, I'm reading a different kind of book, this is not, I'm not reading a history textbook, not that the Bible ever is that, but we all know poetry looks different, you know, just in our world, we all know a history book feels different from a fantasy novel, and I'm not,

I'm never suggesting that Revelation is fantasy, but it has those aspects of strangeness, and again, as you say, these recurring themes, so the better you get to know it, oh yeah, horses and fig trees, those kinds of themes that you mentioned, those are, those are some clues, yeah, I don't know, I just want to, I don't think it's as, in places it's going to be difficult, I can see that, but I don't think it's ever, I think most of the Bible is a pretty clear world reading, that's, that's one reason why I think what I suggested at the end, if you sit down and read Revelation, make sure that you read it with Paul and Jesus as well, because they are, Revelation starts out basically saying, these are visions, these are visions, where Jesus and Paul are talking about the same concepts, but one's a sermon and one's letters, and so that will help calibrate your expectation and your understanding of what's going on.

Matt. Two general observations. I think both liberals and conservatives sometimes confuse the issue of literal versus figurative interpretation with the authority of scripture, and I think those are two different issues.

We all speak in a combination of literal and figurative language. You know, most of the time we speak literally, probably, but we almost always include some figurative language, and of course in poetry we, you know, the figurative seems to go up, but that's one thing to distinguish.

Okay, yeah. And the other thing is that if you say, ah, this is a figure, there always is a literal meaning behind some books.

[53:21] Just because you conclude, ah, this is a figurative language, there is a literal meaning of it. You may not be able to figure it out, but there is some literal meaning language.

An example of that would be like, you know, the lamb has seven eyes in Revelation, and you think like, is Jesus going to have seven eyes? But no, the seven eyes talk about his omniscience.

He sees everything, or the sword coming out of Jesus' mouth. Like, is he going to be walking around with us? No, that's the word of God that cuts like a sword that's coming out of the mouth of Christ, which is an actual thing.

It's not imaginative, it's not some vague idea, it's an actual thing. I think we have time for one quick question, and then we'll break because the service is about to start, but I'm happy to keep talking with some folks.

How do you do that? How culturally common was it then to write like this, and I'm thinking of allegories that were maybe a bit more apparent, and that culture, like, seven, which, you know, now seven doesn't mean a whole lot to make, but back then, it was much more significant.

[54:27] So I guess in early churches and early interpretations, were those things much more apparent, and so they had a different kind of deal of revelation from the point that you might have kind of touched upon?

Yeah, so one is that, yes, it was a little more common. It definitely was more common, but it was still a little unusual, I mean, but it was definitely more common.

We also have to remember, Revelation is written in Greek, but it's written with the Jewish background, someone who's steeped in Judaism, who's a Jew himself, writing to people that are largely Jewish. You can tell that in the letters that they keep having these problems with Jews in their synagogues and things like that.

So a lot of our, almost all of our early interpreters are Greeks or Romans, and so they are coming from a different cultural perspective, and so you have, you have, like, pretty diverse views on Revelation in the early church about what it means.

One of our first instances of event, actually, the first example of someone interpreting Revelation is a guy named Justin the Philosopher, also known as Justin the Martyr.

[55 : 33] He's writing in the year, like, 155 from Ephesus, and he says, there was this guy named John who saw this revelation among us, and he said that the saints would reign a thousand years. He's talking about the millennium, and he says, some of us think this is literal, some of us don't.

Already, like, 50 years in, and they're like, we don't know what to do with this, and you see that, that millennial, that one example has had different sides from the very beginning, and you'll see it with futurism and preterism as well, that the early church, the medieval church, they're all, some of them are on one side, some of them are on the other.

That relates to the numbers, that some of them think, they are more willing, though, to take the numbers as allegorical, that in their, even in Greco-Roman culture, using numbers as a symbol was more common than it is today, but it was still like not, it wasn't like everyday speech, you would be doing that, but it was something that was known and did occur in their culture, whereas in our culture, in Western culture, we usually always have to preface it to explain it.

We can't just assume that people will understand that. Okay, let's break. I'll pray real quick. Father, we just ask you to be with us as we, as we read your word, and you give us hope, and Lord, a godly fear and reverence, Lord, and that you'd help us to call the nations to you through your warnings and revelation, and we pray this in the name of Jesus.

Amen. All right, thanks folks.