

BEHOLD, THE KING IS COMING!

*Understanding the Times and Seasons
as We Await that Great Day*

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An Introductory Guide for Reading and Studying the Revelation

Five Facts About the End of the Age

The RETURN of Christ

1. It will be sudden. *“For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.”* (Matt. 24:27)
2. It will be personal. *“In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”* (John 14:2-3)
3. It will be physical. *“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”* (Acts 1:11)
4. It will be visible. *“Jesus said to (high priest), “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”* (Matt. 26:64)
5. It will be glorious. *“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 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.”* (1 Thess. 4:16-17) *“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.”* (1 Corin. 15:52-53)

The RESURRECTION of All People (the general and the specific resurrection)

“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” (John 5:25-29)

The REIGN of Christ (the millennium and beyond)

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: The LORD is our righteousness.” (Jeremiah 23:5-6)

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” (Colossians 1:15-20)

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2:9-11)

The RIGHTEOUSNESS of Christ (the judgment and separation)

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.” (Matthew 25:31-33f)

The RENEWAL by Christ (the new heavens and new earth)

“Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” (2 Peter 3:11-13)

Background Information to the Revelation

The Author - who wrote this letter?

The popular and nearly indisputable opinion is that the author is the Apostle John, the beloved disciple of Jesus Christ. John also authored the Gospel according to John, as well as three short letters (1, 2, & 3 John).

The Date - when was this letter written?

John was the oldest and last living apostle. John's age, along with reasons that will be described below, make it extremely likely that the Revelation was written near the end of the first century, possibly in the mid-90's AD.

The Genre - what type of letter is this?

The Revelation is a letter that involves two literary forms: prophetic and apocalyptic literature. As a prophecy, the Revelation is a message given by God that **foretells God's future acts** in human history. As an apocalypse, the Revelation is a message given by God that **foretells God's final acts** in human history.

The Theme & Purpose - why was this letter written?

“Revelation unveils the unseen spiritual war in which the church is engaged: the cosmic conflict between God and his Christ on the one hand, and Satan and his evil allies (both demonic and human) on the other. In this conflict, Jesus the Lamb has already won the decisive victory through his sacrificial death, but his church continues to be assaulted by the dragon, in its death-throes, through persecution, false teaching, and the allure of material affluence and cultural approval. By revealing the spiritual realities lying behind the church's trials and temptations, and by affirming the certainty of Christ's triumph in the new heaven and earth, the visions of Revelation fortify believers to endure suffering. The reader of Revelation is encouraged to stay pure from the defiling enticements of the present world order.”¹

¹ This well-stated description of the theme and purpose of the Revelation comes from the introductory material on the book of Revelation found in the *ESV Study Bible*, p. 2453-2461.

Four Common Approaches to Interpreting and Applying the Revelation

1. *The Preterist Approach*

The events of the Revelation refer and relate only to the day in which it was written. Coming from the Latin word *praeteritus* meaning “an age or time gone by”, Martyn Lloyd-Jones rightly defined Preterism this way: “This is a teaching which tells us that everything that is prophesied in the book of Revelation has already happened, that, indeed, it had all happened by the beginning of the fourth century of the Christian Era.”²

2. *The Futurist Approach*

The events of the Revelation describe historical events still to come in the distant future. Or as Cornelius Venema stated, “The futurist approach to the book of Revelation regards the visions of chapters 4-22 as referring to events that lie in the future, events that will occur immediately prior to Christ’s second coming and the end of history.”³

3. *The Idealist Approach*

The events of the Revelation are only a symbolic picture of the enduring struggle between good and evil, and between Christianity and paganism. As described by Sam Storms, “The so-called Idealist view of Revelation contends that the prophecies of this book are not concerned with any specific period, event, or series of events in church history. Rather, its primary purpose is to describe symbolically the conflict of good and evil throughout history and the principles on which God acts at all times.”⁴

4. *The Historicist Approach*

The events of the Revelation outline the entire course of the history of the church, from Pentecost to the Second Coming of Christ. “The preterist view puts the main contents of the book entirely into the past; the futurist teaching puts the events entirely in the future. The historicist view does neither, but teaches that the book of Revelation is a prophecy of the history of the kingdom of God from the first to the second advent.”⁵

² Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible*, Crossway, 2003, Volume Three, p. 144.

³ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/interpreting-revelation/>

⁴ Sam Storms, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, the Ruler of Kings on Earth”, a sermon preached at Bridgeway Church on April 23, 2017.

⁵ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, p. 148.

Across the spectrum of these various ways to interpret and apply the events of the Revelation, Daniel Lewis offers a very sensible word of caution. Lewis writes, “The various eschatological systems superimposed upon the text of Scripture attempts to provide interpretations of the biblical data that are cohesive, logical, and plausible. Since these systems sharply differ at various points, it is clear that they cannot all be right. In fact, we must recognize the possibility that while they all cannot be right, they all could be wrong. Thus it is critical that Christians not establish any eschatological system at the center of theology. The center of theology is Jesus Christ, God’s Son, the Savior of the world. To be sure, part of the Bible’s clear teaching about this is that he will come again, but the timing and surrounding events are ambiguous.”⁶

Defining Four Essential and Elusive Eschatological Terms⁷

1. The Millennium

Arising from the Latin word for “thousand”, the millennium refers to the thousand-year reign of Christ mentioned in Revelations 20:1-8. There are basically three understandings as to what this text teaches: premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism. In contrast to amillennialism, who do not see the millennium as a specific period of history, both post- and premillennialists are technically millennialists in that both anticipate that the millennium will occur at some future time (or arrived in the recent past). Millennialism also goes by the term chiliasm, arising out of the biblical Greek word *chilias*, meaning “one thousand.” In contemporary theology, chiliasm is often used in the narrower sense of referring to belief in the premillennial return of Christ.

2. The Tribulation

The internal and external suffering of God’s people which, according to NT teaching, followers of Jesus Christ are to expect as a matter of course. The NT references to the “great tribulation” describe an unprecedented period of global suffering that will mark the time just prior to the parousia (“presence”). Different millennial views place the time of the tribulation at different points in relation to the millennium. Likewise, different views of the time of the rapture place this event at different points in relation to the eschatological tribulation.

⁶ Daniel J. Lewis, *3 Crucial Questions About the Last Days*, Baker Publishing Group, 1998, p. 130.

⁷ The definitions of these terms come from the *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, by Stanley Greutz, David Guretzki, and Cherish Fee Nordling, IPV, 1999.

3. The Rapture

From the Latin *rapio* (caught up), the belief that the church will be caught up (Greek *harpazo*, 1 Thess 4:17) and united with Christ at his second coming. One point of contention among theologians is the time of the rapture, especially in relation to the great tribulation period associated with the end of the age. The views regarding the related timing of these events lead to the designations pre-, mid- and posttribulationists for the views that the rapture occurs prior to, during or at the end of the tribulation. Some theologians view the rapture as a biblical image referring to the church's greeting the returning Christ.

4. The Judgment

In a broad sense, God's evaluation as to the rightness or wrongness of an act of a creature, whether human or angelic, using the standard of God's own righteousness and holy character. In a more specific sense, judgment refers to the future event when God through Jesus Christ will judge all people, whether righteous or wicked, for their works done while on earth. The NT indicates that all people, whether Christian or not, will be judged according to their deeds; however Christians will be accepted in light of the work of Christ on their behalf.

An Outline of the Revelation

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| A. The Opening (or Prologue) | v. 1:1-8 |
| B. The Great Vision | v. 1:9-20 |
| C. The Cyclical Remembrance | v. 2:1-19:20 |
| 1. The Seven Churches (v. 2:1-5:14) | |
| 2. The Seven Seals (v. 6:1-8:5) | |
| 3. The Seven Trumpets (v. 8:6-11:19) | |
| 4. The Seven Bowls (v. 12:1-19:20) | |
| D. The Apex of the Revelation | v. 20:1-22:5 |
| E. The Closing (or Epilogue) | v. 22:6-21 |

A Diagram of "the Vision"

