

Eschatology

Making Revelation Understandable



“The Lamb wins. Babylon falls. The saints are vindicated. God dwells with His people.”

EPISODE STUDY & SHOW NOTES

Designed for listening, personal study, small-group discussion, and use inside Rooted Word.

Episode Overview

Key question: How should Christians think about Revelation and the end times without confusing different debates or losing the book's pastoral purpose?

Big idea: Revelation unveils Jesus Christ as the reigning Lamb and coming King. Christians may disagree about the sequence of end-time events, but the book calls the church to faithful endurance, promises the defeat of evil, and ends with God dwelling with His redeemed people in a renewed creation.

Primary passages: Matthew 24:29–31; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–4; Revelation 20:1–8; Revelation 21–22

Supporting passages: Revelation 1–5; Revelation 6–19; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; Revelation 3:10; Daniel 9:24–27

WHY THIS MATTERS

The point of Revelation is not to turn Christians into headline decoders. If studying the book makes us obsessed with beasts, politicians, technology, or wars but not more faithful, hopeful, holy, and confident in Christ, we have probably missed its purpose.

1. Start With Three Different Questions

A lot of end-times confusion comes from mixing together labels that actually answer different questions.

When is the church caught up?

- Pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, pre-wrath, and post-tribulation describe where 1 Thessalonians 4:17 fits relative to tribulation and divine wrath.

When does Jesus return relative to the millennium?

- Premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism describe how Revelation 20's "thousand years" relates to Christ's return.

How does Revelation relate to history?

- Futurist, preterist, historicist, and idealist describe how the visions relate to first-century events, church history, recurring spiritual realities, and the future.

A USEFUL REMINDER

Pre-tribulation and premillennialism are not synonyms. A Christian can be premillennial and post-tribulational. Likewise, preterism is an interpretive approach, not another word for postmillennialism.

What Christians Should Agree On

- Jesus Christ will personally, bodily, visibly, and gloriously return.
- The dead will be raised and believers will ultimately be with Christ.
- Final judgment is real, and Satan and evil will finally be defeated.

Rooted in Scripture. Growing in truth. Living faithfully.

- History is moving toward God's appointed conclusion.
- God will bring about the new heavens and new earth and dwell forever with His redeemed people.

KEY TAKEAWAY

We can disagree over the order of the furniture without disagreeing about the house: Jesus returns, the dead are raised, judgment comes, evil loses, and God makes all things new.

2. What Does “Rapture” Mean?

The word rapture usually does not appear in English Bibles, but the concept is biblical. In 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Paul says believers will be “caught up.” The Greek term is *harpazō*, carrying the sense of being seized, snatched, or caught up. The Latin tradition used a form of *rapio*, which is where the English term rapture comes from.

THE REAL QUESTION

The debate is not whether believers are caught up to meet Christ. The debate is when that happens and whether it is a separate event from Christ's visible second coming.

Pre-Tribulation

Basic sequence: Rapture → Tribulation → Visible Return of Christ → Millennium.

The church is caught up to Christ before a distinct future period of great tribulation. This view is especially associated with dispensational premillennialism and commonly emphasizes 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, 1 Thessalonians 5:9, Revelation 3:10, Daniel 9:24–27, and Revelation 6–19.

- A major argument is that believers are not appointed to God's wrath.
- Dispensational interpreters commonly connect the Tribulation with Daniel's seventieth week and maintain a strong continuing distinction between Israel and the church.

Questions for the pre-trib view

- Does being spared from God's wrath require being removed from the earth before tribulation?
- Is tribulation the same thing as divine wrath?
- Does Scripture clearly describe two stages of Christ's coming—one for His church and another public return afterward?
- Does the relative absence of the word “church” in Revelation 6–18 establish that the church is no longer present?

Post-Tribulation

Basic sequence: Tribulation/persecution → Visible Return of Christ + Resurrection/Rapture → Millennium, for post-trib premillennialists.

The church remains on earth through the final period of persecution. At Christ's visible return, the dead in Christ are raised, living believers are caught up to meet Him, and Christ triumphs over His enemies. Common passages include Matthew 24:29–31, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, 2 Thessalonians 2:1–4, Revelation 13–14, and Revelation 19.

Questions for the post-trib view

- If Scripture says recognizable events must happen first, in what sense can Christ's return be "imminent"?
- How should persecution by evil powers be distinguished from God's wrath?

Mid-Trib and Pre-Wrath

- Mid-tribulation places the rapture approximately halfway through a future seven-year tribulation.
- Pre-wrath places the rapture after significant tribulation but before the climactic outpouring of God's wrath.

KEY DISTINCTION

Pre-wrath especially distinguishes tribulation and persecution by Satan or Antichrist from God's judicial wrath.

3. The Millennium - Revelation 20

The major millennial views are trying to answer one question: how should Revelation 20's "thousand years" relate to Christ's return? Much of the debate concentrates on Revelation 20:1–8 and how those verses fit with the rest of Scripture.

Dispensational Premillennialism

Jesus returns before the millennium. A typical sequence is: Rapture → Tribulation → Second Coming → Millennium → Final Judgment → New Creation.

- Future earthly kingdom, commonly understood as a literal thousand-year reign of Christ.
- Strong distinction between Israel and the church.
- Future role for national Israel.
- Largely futurist reading of Revelation.
- Commonly pre-tribulation.

Representative voices: J. N. Darby; C. I. Scofield; Lewis Sperry Chafer; John Walvoord; Charles Ryrie; John MacArthur

Historic Premillennialism

Jesus still returns before a future earthly millennium, but historic premillennialism normally does not use the same Israel/church distinction as dispensationalism.

- Commonly post-tribulational.
- Often emphasizes the kingdom as already present in Christ but not yet consummated.

Representative voices: George Eldon Ladd; John Piper; Wayne Grudem. Early Christians such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus are often cited as evidence of early premillennial belief.

Amillennialism

The name can be misleading. Amillennialists do not believe there is "no millennium." They generally understand the thousand years symbolically as Christ's present reign, commonly associated with the church age and the heavenly reign of the saints.

- Christ reigns now → gospel advance and suffering → final conflict → Christ returns → resurrection/judgment → new creation.
- There is no separate earthly thousand-year kingdom after Christ returns.
- A major argument is recapitulation: Revelation may tell overlapping portions of the same story from different angles rather than always moving in strict chronology.

Representative voices: Augustine; Anthony Hoekema; Louis Berkhof; Kim Riddlebarger; Sam Storms

Postmillennialism

Jesus returns after the millennium. The millennium is generally understood as a long era in which the gospel experiences extraordinary success throughout the world before Christ returns.

- Expects widespread conversion and significant gospel flourishing among the nations.
- Does not mean humans create a secular utopia through politics; the claim is that the gospel succeeds extraordinarily through the work of God.

Representative voices: Jonathan Edwards; B. B. Warfield; Loraine Boettner; significant strands of Puritan and Reformed tradition

QUICK COMPARISON

Premillennial: Jesus returns → millennium. Postmillennial: millennium → Jesus returns.

Amillennial: the millennium describes Christ's present reign rather than a separate future earthly kingdom after His return.

4. Four Ways Christians Read Revelation

Futurist

Most of Revelation 4–22 primarily concerns events still future, especially those surrounding Christ's return. This view takes future judgment and final conflict seriously, but it can become a newspaper decoder if it is disconnected from the seven churches who first received the book.

Preterist

Preterist means “past.” A preterist interprets substantial portions of prophecy as fulfilled in the ancient world, especially in connection with Rome and/or Jerusalem.

- Partial preterism still affirms the future bodily return of Christ, resurrection, final judgment, and new creation.
- R. C. Sproul is a well-known example of a partial-preterist reading of significant portions of the Olivet Discourse.
- Full preterism extends fulfillment to the second coming and resurrection, interpreting those as already fulfilled. The episode notes identify this as outside historic orthodox Christian eschatology.

Why full preterists argue this way

- “This generation” in Matthew 24:34 is taken to refer to Jesus' own generation.
- Revelation's “soon,” “near,” and “quickly” language is read in its ordinary first-century sense.

- Matthew 24 is read as one unified prophecy rather than an AD 70 section followed by a distant future section.
- “Coming on the clouds” is understood as covenantal or judicial coming language fulfilled in AD 70.
- Resurrection and new-creation language is interpreted spiritually or covenantally as already realized.

Historicist

Historicists read Revelation as a prophetic panorama of church and world history from John’s day until Christ’s return. In many classic schemes, the early seals were opened centuries ago.

- Seal 1 - early gospel advance / apostolic era.
- Seals 2–4 - warfare, famine, plague, and decline in the Roman Empire.
- Seal 5 - persecution of Christians.
- Seal 6 - major political upheaval, often connected with Constantine and the fall of pagan Rome.
- Seal 7 - opens into the trumpet judgments, which continue the historical sequence.

Idealist

Idealists see Revelation mainly as symbolic pictures of recurring spiritual realities throughout the church age, rather than a strict timeline of one-time events.

- Beasts = recurring anti-God powers or empires.
- Babylon = the corrupt world system opposed to God.
- Seals, trumpets, and bowls = repeated patterns of judgment, suffering, and conflict.
- Dragon vs. Lamb = Satan’s opposition to Christ and His people.
- The recurring question is faithfulness versus compromise.

THE IDEALIST QUESTION

Less: “Which exact historical event is this?” More: “What spiritual reality is this symbol revealing about the church’s struggle in every age?”

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO PICK ONLY ONE

Many interpreters combine first-century context, recurring spiritual patterns, and a final future climax. The beast, for example, may reflect Roman imperial power, recurring anti-Christian empire, and a final climactic anti-God power without those layers being mutually exclusive.

5. Revelation - A Simple Roadmap

Revelation 1 - The risen Christ. Start with Jesus - not the beast.

Revelation 2–3 - Seven churches. Repent. Endure. Resist compromise. Overcome.

Revelation 4–5 - The heavenly throne and the Lamb. God rules history; the slain Lamb is worthy.

Revelation 6–11 - Seals and trumpets. Judgment, suffering, witness, and divine sovereignty.

Revelation 12–14 - Woman, dragon, beasts, Lamb. Earthly persecution reflects a larger spiritual conflict.

Revelation 15–16 - Bowls. Climactic divine judgment.

Revelation 17–18 - Fall of Babylon. The seductive economic, political, and religious world system opposed to God collapses.

Revelation 19 - Christ returns. The Rider conquers the beast and false prophet.

Revelation 20 - Millennium, Satan's defeat, final judgment. The chapter around which much of the millennial debate centers.

Revelation 21–22 - New creation and New Jerusalem. The destination is God dwelling with His people.

6. Hot-Button Terms Without the Hype

Antichrist

The word “antichrist” occurs in John’s letters, not in Revelation. Revelation speaks of the beast, while 2 Thessalonians 2 speaks of the man of lawlessness. Many theological systems connect these figures, but Scripture does not simply label Revelation’s beast “the Antichrist.”

666

One major historical interpretation connects 666 with Nero Caesar through Hebrew gematria, where letters also function numerically. An ancient 616 textual variant is often discussed alongside that proposal. Another interpretation sees 666 symbolically as counterfeit humanity and rebellion that falls short of divine completeness.

Mark of the Beast

The mark is tied to worship, allegiance, and economic pressure. It contrasts with God sealing His own people in Revelation 7 and 14. Before asking whether the mark is a specific technology, the deeper question is: Who owns your allegiance and worship?

Babylon

Babylon represents the seductive, wealthy, idolatrous, persecuting world-city or system opposed to God. Rome provides an obvious first-century backdrop for many interpreters, but the imagery can also describe the recurring human temptation to replace God with wealth, power, pleasure, and empire.

Armageddon

Revelation 16:16 names Har-Magedon / Armageddon. Interpreters differ over whether John intends a literal future location, a symbolic final conflict, or both. The theological point is the gathering and defeat of rebellious powers opposed to God.

The 144,000

Dispensational interpreters often identify the 144,000 as a literal future Jewish remnant. Other interpreters understand $12 \times 12 \times 1,000$ symbolically as the completeness of God’s redeemed people. Either way, the pastoral point is that God knows, seals, and preserves His own.

7. Historical Context That Makes Revelation Less Weird

Revelation was sent to seven real churches in Roman Asia Minor. They faced persecution, social pressure, compromise, false teaching, wealth, poverty, idolatry, and pressure to conform to Roman society.

- Roman imperial ideology matters: Caesar's claims, civic religion, emperor veneration, and economic life were often intertwined.
- That context helps explain why Revelation repeatedly connects worship, political power, economic participation, and allegiance.

Why so many Old Testament images?

- Daniel - beasts, kingdoms, Son of Man.
- Exodus - plagues and deliverance.
- Ezekiel - temple, city, throne imagery.
- Isaiah - judgment and new creation.
- Zechariah - horses, lampstands, judgment imagery.

A BETTER FIRST MOVE

If Revelation seems strange, sometimes the answer is not another prophecy chart. It is knowing the Old Testament better.

8. Where Some Major Voices Land

John MacArthur - Dispensational / Pre-trib / Premillennial. Rapture before tribulation; future tribulation; visible return; earthly millennium.

Wayne Grudem - Historic Premillennial / Post-trib. The church goes through tribulation; Christ returns before a future millennium.

John Piper - Historic Premillennial / Post-trib. One climactic public return after tribulation followed by a future earthly reign.

George Eldon Ladd - Historic Premillennial / Post-trib. Strong emphasis on inaugurated eschatology: the kingdom is already present in Christ but not yet fully consummated.

Augustine - Foundational Amillennial. Understood the thousand years as Christ's present reign rather than a future earthly millennium.

Anthony Hoekema - Amillennial. Present reign of Christ; one final return; resurrection; judgment; new creation.

Jonathan Edwards - Postmillennial. Expected a future era of widespread gospel flourishing before Christ's return.

B. B. Warfield - Postmillennial / gospel-triumph expectation. Associated with broad kingdom expansion and gospel success before the return.

R. C. Sproul - Partial Preterist. Read substantial portions of the Olivet Discourse in connection with first-century judgment while affirming a future bodily return and resurrection.

HISTORICAL CAUTION

Modern labels are useful, but they do not map perfectly onto every earlier theologian. Augustine and Edwards were not answering a twenty-first-century prophecy chart.

9. The Tabernacle Connection

Revelation 21 brings the episode back to the biblical story of God dwelling with His people. The New Jerusalem is cube-shaped, echoing the shape of the Most Holy Place. What began as guarded access to God's presence reaches its climax in a redeemed creation where God and the Lamb are the temple.

THE BIBLICAL MOVEMENT

Tabernacle → Temple → Christ → Spirit-indwelt people of God → New Jerusalem. What the Tabernacle anticipated becomes creation-wide reality: God dwells with His people.

10. Apply

Revelation is not mainly asking whether you can build the most detailed timeline. It repeatedly calls believers to hear, repent, endure, worship, resist compromise, bear faithful witness, and overcome.

THIS WEEK

When end-times discussion comes up, ask one question before reaching for a chart: "What does this passage call the church to believe, endure, resist, or worship?"

Reflection

- If you were sitting in one of Revelation's seven churches when the book was first read aloud, what would you think John was telling you?
- Are 1 Thessalonians 4, Matthew 24, and Revelation 19 describing separate comings or different perspectives on the same return?
- Does "not appointed to wrath" require Christians to be removed before tribulation?
- What is the difference between persecution and God's wrath?
- Is Revelation 19 → 20 necessarily strict chronology, or could Revelation 20 recapitulate the church age from another perspective?
- What does your eschatological system do with Israel and the church?
- Which part of your own position is hardest to prove?
- Are you reading Revelation from the text itself or mainly through a system you learned first?
- Why are Christians often more fascinated with Antichrist than with Christ?
- What should believing Revelation change about your life on Monday morning?

11. Pray

Ask God for humility where Scripture leaves room for disagreement, courage to endure suffering without compromise, wisdom to read Revelation in its biblical and historical context, and a deeper longing for Christ's return and the day God dwells openly with His people.

12. Further Scripture for Study

Matthew 24:29–31 - Jesus' teaching about tribulation and the coming of the Son of Man.

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 - The resurrection of the dead in Christ and believers being caught up to meet the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 - The day of the Lord, watchfulness, and the promise that believers are not appointed to wrath.

2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 - The coming of Christ, the gathering of believers, and the man of lawlessness.

Revelation 1–5 - The risen Christ, the seven churches, the heavenly throne, and the Lamb.

Revelation 13–14 - The beasts, allegiance, the mark, and the Lamb with His people.

Revelation 19–20 - Christ's victory, the millennium, Satan's defeat, and final judgment.

Revelation 21–22 - New creation, New Jerusalem, and God dwelling with His people.

CLOSING TAKEAWAY

If your end-times system makes you better at identifying villains but not better at enduring suffering, resisting compromise, worshiping Christ, loving His church, and longing for His appearing, you have probably missed what Revelation is trying to do to you.

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