

# A Survey of Revelation

## Week 1: Introduction

### Class Overview

#### Important Information:

- This class is streaming LIVE! That means anything and everything could happen!
- Though it is streaming live, you don't have to watch it live. Each class will be posted after it streams and available to watch at any time on-demand at [friends.church/revelation](http://friends.church/revelation).
- Make sure to download the handout prior to watching each week's study. Handouts can be found at [friends.church/revelation](http://friends.church/revelation).
- This class is a **survey** of Revelation. It will not cover every single passage, symbol or interpretational difficulty within the book of Revelation.
- Instead, this class will seek to impart an understanding of the structure of the book of Revelation and how all its individual parts fit together.
- I will not deal with every objection one may have to the interpretation of Revelation that I take. However, I am happy to answer recurring questions that come up. You can email any questions to [questions@friends.church](mailto:questions@friends.church).
- Finally, the ultimate point of this class is *not* to make predictions about when the end of time will come. Instead, it's to draw closer to God through His Son, Jesus Christ!

#### Class Overview<sup>1</sup>

Week 1:	Introduction		
Week 2:	Prologue and Original Vision	1:1-20	
Week 3:	The Seven Letters	2:1-3:21	
Week 4:	The Throne Room Vision	4:1-5:14	
Week 5:	Introduction to Revelation 6-20		<i>Note: I reserve the right to change this at any time, including adding additional weeks if I feel the need!</i>
Week 6:	The Seal Judgments	6:1-8:1	
Week 7:	The Trumpet Judgments	8:2-11:19	
Week 8:	The Conflict with the False Trinity	12:1-14:20	
Week 9:	The Bowl Judgments	15:1-16:21	
Week 10:	The Destruction of the Evil Empire	17:1-19:5	
Week 11:	The Eschaton	19:6-20:15	
Week 12:	The New Heavens and New Earth	21:1-22:21	

#### Week 1 Overview

In this introductory week, we will seek to answer the following 3 Questions:

1. Why did God give us Revelation?
2. How do we interpret Revelation? (An Overview!)
3. What does Revelation mean for us today?

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<sup>1</sup> The outline of Revelation is adapted from Grant Osborne, *Revelation: Verse by Verse*.

## Why Did God Give Us Revelation?

- The book of Revelation is primarily designed to answer one question:

***If God is in control and if God is good, then why has He allowed things to get so bad here on earth?***

*The book of Revelation “addresses a serious crisis of faith. If God is truly in control, why has he allowed things to get so bad here on this earth? In reply, [Revelation] boldly proclaims that God has **not** turned his back on the world. Just the opposite: God is going to intervene radically and unexpectedly to introduce a solution that will solve all problems.”*

*- D. Brent Sandy, Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*

- Therefore, the primary purpose of Revelation is a **call to endurance and perseverance in the Christian faith**, no matter what comes our way.

*“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)*

- But that’s not the only purpose of Revelation. There are other purposes, as well:

A Call to **Worship**:

A Picture “**Behind the Scenes**”:

Moral **Courage**:

A **Warning** and a **Call to Repentance**:

*“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.”  
(Revelation 1:3)*

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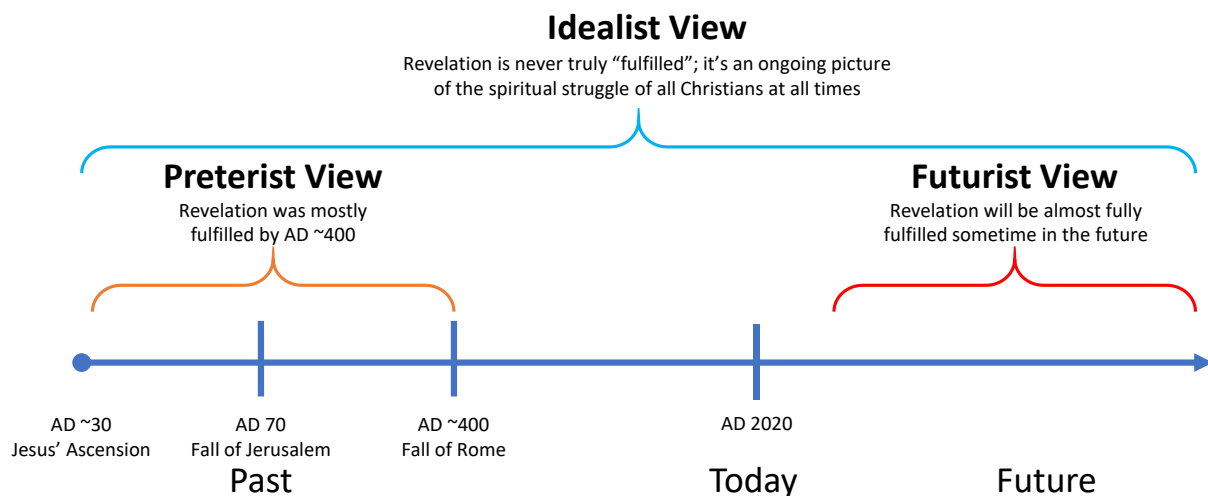
Note: See important information on the resources used in this study at the end of this handout.

## How Do We Interpret Revelation? An Overview

- Question 1: When does the book of Revelation take place? Does it describe the past, the present or the future?**

Believe it or not, not everybody believes Revelation is about the end of time. In fact, historically there have been three main approaches to the book of Revelation.

1. **Revelation Describes the FUTURE (Futurist View)**: Revelation predicts a world that is still in the future; it is (almost) exclusively a picture of the end of all history.
2. **Revelation Describes the PAST (Preterist View)**: Revelation has been mostly already fulfilled in the fall of the Roman Empire (or, alternatively, the fall of Jerusalem); we are now living in a symbolic “millennium” of Christ’s reign in Revelation 20.
3. **Revelation Describes the PRESENT (Idealist View)**: Revelation does not refer to any specific event(s) or time period—past or future. Instead, it is a stylized depiction (an “allegory,” if you will) of the ongoing struggle between good and evil in the life of the church/believer.



- My View:

The “Eclectic” View of Revelation: I believe Revelation is **simultaneously past, present and future.**

How can I say this? Because of 1 John 2:18:

*“Dear children, this is the last hour; **and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come.** This is how we know it is the last hour.” (1 John 2:18)*

Have you noticed how history tends to repeat itself? Evil empires and evil men keep on rising up, and, eventually, they are destroyed? Why? 1 John 2:18 makes it clear: while human rulers come and go, the forces behind these human rulers are constant. In this life, one either serves God or serves Satan. Satan always tries to oppose God—and he often does it through evil, wicked rulers who try to persecute and snuff out God’s people. And God is always victorious—and He often reveals his victory through the destruction of these rulers and their empires. This is destined to repeat until God once and for all destroys all evil in the coming of His Son, Jesus.

This is what the book of Revelation is about:

*“Doubtless John would interpret the visions in the light of his own historical situation. Rome would be the beast, and the provincial priesthood that enforced the imperial cult would be the false prophet. **What he could not know from his vantage point was that the dissolution of the Roman Empire was but a model of the ultimate collapse of all worldly opposition to the kingdom of God.**” - Robert Mounce, *Revelation*.*

This is why I also believe Revelation depicts the ongoing, never-ending struggle of living “in, but not from,” this world (see John 17:16). It is applicable to all Christians at all times. In this way, I also stand with the “**idealist**” interpretation.

Therefore, I will in this study seek to show how Revelation points to the **past, present and future all at the same time.**

## Question 2: But What About the Images of Revelation?

- Once we understand the general approach we will take to Revelation, another pressing question concerns the **images** of Revelation. How do we understand, for example, the Locusts of Revelation 9? The woman of Revelation 12? The beast of Revelation 17?
- **Approach 1: Look to the *Future* and Interpret them *Literally*.** One approach which came to prominence in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, was to *look to the future and interpret them literally*, and to declare that in these images, John was trying to describe a world that he had no background for.

*“How could this first-century man describe the scientific wonders of the latter twentieth century? He had to illustrate them with phenomena of the first century...Much of the symbolism John used was the result of a first century man being catapulted in God’s time machine up to the end of the twentieth century, then returned to his own time and commanded to write what he had seen and heard. The only way that John could obey that instruction was to use phenomena with which he was familiar to illustrate the scientific and technical marvels that he predicts... the locusts [of Rev. 9] might symbolize an advanced kind of helicopter. This is just one example of the fast-moving, contemporary, and often deductive manner in which I have chosen to approach the Book of Revelation.” - Hal Lindsey*



- Though there is something attractive about this approach, it does not fit with what we know about the book Revelation.
- **Approach 2: Look to the *Past* and Interpret them *Symbolically*.** Rather than look *forward* to interpret the symbols of Revelation and interpret them literally, it’s best to look *back*—to the Old Testament—and interpret them (mostly) *symbolically*, using the meaning given to them in the Old Testament.

Revelation has more references and allusions to the Old Testament than all of the other books of the New Testament **combined**. It’s best to conclude, therefore, that the images of Revelation are not *necessarily* to be taken literally (though some can be). Rather, they are **symbols** of something, the meaning of which is often found in the Old Testament.

*“What the **locust swarm** has left the **great locusts** have eaten; what the **great locusts** have left the **young locusts** have eaten; what the **young locusts** have left **other locusts** have eaten....<sup>6</sup> **A nation has invaded my land, a mighty army without number; it has the teeth of a lion, the fangs of a lioness.**” (Joel 1:4, 6)*

*“Most people take Revelation as a springboard for looking forward. However, without first looking back to the Old Testament and seeing what it meant in John’s time, and then moving forward from there to the present, we will not properly understand what Revelation has to say about the past, the present, or the future.” - G.K. Beale, The Book of Revelation*

- That such an interpretation is intended is indicated by Revelation, itself:

“The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. **He made it known** [Grk: “**He symbolized**”] by sending his angel to his servant John.” (Revelation 1:1)

Thus, John is telling us that Revelation is full of **symbols** meant to convey meaning.

- Thus I will do my best in this study to show you the background for the symbols that John uses, and the meaning that John was conveying by them.

### **Finally, A Plea for Humility**

- Every generation since Revelation was written has believed that it is being fulfilled in its day.
- This calls for humility in interpreting Revelation. There will be some symbols, images, meanings which escape our understanding. Rather than participate in endless speculation, we will approach Revelation humbly, declaring at some points that we cannot know for certain what is being talked about, as “the secret things belong to the Lord” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

## What Does Revelation Mean for Us Today?

- Perhaps the main point of Revelation is this:

***Despite appearances to the contrary at times, God is in charge.***

- One author says that the “theme” verse of Revelation is Revelation 1:8:

“‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.’” (Revelation 1:8)

- This means that the **God who controlled the past and who controls the future is also controlling the present.**

It’s often easy to see evidence of God’s hand in the past in our lives.  
It’s often easy to remember that God has the future in His hands.  
But can we also remember that God is in control of the present?

- **RIGHT NOW, even in this season, God is in charge. This current season is not a detour from God’s plan; it’s been part of it from the very beginning.**
- Even the forces of evil are ultimately unable to do anything apart from God’s sovereign hand.
- **Revelation asks us to see all of history, including right now, as under God’s control—and to live our lives accordingly.**
- Are you living as though God is in control? If not, there is no better time to start!

***Homework for next week: Read Revelation 1 every day for five days!***

## Questions for Group Discussion

1. What has been your experience with Revelation? How have you heard it taught before? Have you done your own study of it? Have you found it comforting? Challenging? Describe your “history” with the book of Revelation.
2. On page 2, we see several reasons listed for why God gave us the book of Revelation. Which one stands out to you the most and why?
3. React to the quote by D. Brent Sandy on pg. 2. How does the fact that we know God is going to intervene dramatically one day give you endurance in the present? How does it speak to a certain situation that you are going through right now?
4. On pages 3-4, we saw a few different interpretational approaches to the book of Revelation, including the view that we are going to take in this survey, the “eclectic” view. Have you heard of any of these views before? What do you think about them? What do you think about the “eclectic” view we are going to take in this study? (How have you seen “history repeat itself”?)
5. We talked about how the best way to interpret the symbols of Revelation is to look to the *past*—to the Old Testament—instead of looking to the future. How do you think this might shed new meaning on the book of Revelation?
6. Why do you think humility is so important in approaching the book of Revelation? How do we draw the line between being humble and yet not compromising what the word of God clearly teaches us?
7. Where do you need the truth right now that “God who controlled the past and who controls the future is also controlling the present”?



## Appendix: Bibliography

Though the handouts in this survey are original and created specifically for this study by the author, Christopher Ward, much of the *content* contained in these handouts—including, at times, specific wording and phrases—is cultivated from various sources (sometimes without direct attribution), the most prominent of which are listed alphabetically by author’s last name, below.<sup>2</sup>

G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

G.K. Beale, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015).

Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020).

Alan Hultberg, ed., *Three Views on the Rapture: Pretribulation, Prewrath, or Posttribulation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).

Alan Hultberg, PhD, *Lecture Notes from Daniel/Revelation Class* (La Mirada, CA: Talbot School of Theology, 2008 and 2020).

Alan Kurschner, *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord* (Pompton Lakes, NJ: Eschatos Publishing, 2013).

Alan Kurschner, *Eschatos Ministries Website* (<https://www.alankurschner.com/>).

Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation: Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

Grant T. Osborne, *Revelation: Verse by Verse* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Grant T. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002).

Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* and *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1992 [1-7] and 1995 [8-22]).

John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press 1966).

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<sup>2</sup> Note that I do not agree with everything in all of these resources, and the inclusion of them here do not constitute an unqualified endorsement of them. As with anything related to the Bible—including anything I say in this survey—it is incumbent upon the reader to examine the Scriptures to see if what is being said is true (Acts 17:11).