

Session 3 - The Consequences of Ideas: Addressing the Different Interpretations of the Book

I. MANDATORY RESPECT FOR THE BOOK OF REVELATION

“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.”
(Revelation 1:1-3)

- A. Most honest and sincere believers would approach the first view verses of the book the same way at a very basic level. They would all affirm the idea that we are to “read,” “hear” and “keep” the message of the book; though at varying degrees and at differing levels of course. Most believers are not opposed to the book being in their Bible (though they may not want to read it!)

- B. However, the way in which people think that the book is to be read, heard and kept differs from individual to individual and from denomination to denomination; and radically! So the question of “how to approach the book” is extremely relevant. In view of the seemingly endless sea of opinions clouding the main message of this book, we need a compass to navigate through them. Rightly viewing the message of the beauty of Jesus and the reality of His return is contingent upon resisting the temptation to embrace false teachings; false teachings that are so prolific in our day. And that is an integral part of growing into maturity. We can’t call this “semantics” and choose to stay away from the book. We need to see our pursuit of truth concerning the beauty of Jesus and the reality of His return as growing in grace unto maturity in Christ.



“...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ...” (Ephesians 4:14-15)

- C. Before addressing the varying opinions that surround the issue of interpretation I want to point out from these first verses that **respect for the book of Revelation is mandatory.** That is, we must acknowledge the importance of the book. Even before we understand *why it's important*, the prologue (1:1-3) gives us ample reason to take it seriously and to approach it with humility willing to submit to whatever the Lord would have us submit to in the text. For those who want to ignore it, the Lord says “**Read it;**” for those who want to block it out, the Lord says “**Hear it;**” and for those who want to do away with it, the Lord says “**Keep it.**”

*⁷ I (Jesus) **am coming quickly!** Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book ...⁹ I (angel) **am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book...**¹⁰ He said to me, “**Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book...**¹⁶ I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things...” ¹⁷ The Spirit and the Bride say, “**Come!**” ...¹⁸ I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life...²⁰ Even so, come, Lord Jesus! (Rev. 22:6-20)*

- D. So in this session we’re going to address how we’re to “read,” “hear” and “keep” the book.

II. THE THREE MAIN “DISASTER VIEWS” CRIPPLING THE CHURCH

- A. Among the varying opinions circulating concerning the nature, message and contents of the book of Revelation there are three views that are the most **prominent** and the most **disastrous**.
- B. We’re going to consider these three views in a broad and introductory way. But before we do, I want to make sure that we are clear on this: *Many sincere, humble and Christ adoring believers hold these views. And the fact that they hold these views does not mean that they are reprobate, conniving or licentious.* They are just misled; for whatever reason. Some are in willful disobedience. But many



have just been misled by false teaching and are willing to hear truth. There is a big difference between being “misled” and “giving heed to doctrines of demons.” Many who have been misled will be brought into truth because they love truth. We as community must foster this love for truth at all costs. And we must use wisdom, humility and discernment when speaking concerning these realities knowing that not all men are willfully distorting the truth and that not all men love truth.

¹ ***The Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons...2 having their conscience seared... (1 Tim. 4:1-2)***

⁷ ***The mystery of lawlessness is already at work...9 The coming of the lawless one (Antichrist) is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception...because they did not receive the love of the truth... (2 Thess. 2:7-10)***

- C. We need to be humble in our speech when approaching false interpretation giving honor and respect to those who hold them. AND we need to be bold in speaking the truth in opposition to them. And we need to remember that some are willfully distorting truth and others are seeking it but have been temporarily misled. This will temper our speech concerning the end-times.
- D. Some will change their minds and some will persist. But we pray for change and hope for the best. And we labor in the place of prayer and study to become clear and to become steadfast. Our goal is not to win an argument – it’s to sway hearts in the hour of need when disagreement with God’s purposes can result in terrifying consequences.
- E. I call the following views “disaster views” not to be mean or disrespectful but to communicate the fact that an adherence to these views sets individuals and congregations up for disaster in the days of transition. You can be sincere, genuine, born again and studious and still find yourself at odds with God in the midst of judgment.
- F. It didn’t matter how much you loved God and studied His word; if you didn’t obey Noah’s specific instructions to the people you drowned to death with lungs full of mud. It didn’t matter how humble and sincere you were in the days of Assyrian invasion if you didn’t listen to Hosea, Amos and Isaiah. If you didn’t



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listen you would have been slain by the swords of Sennacherib's army. It didn't matter how many Temple services you went to or how much you loved God in the days of John the Baptist if you didn't listen to him. If John and Jesus' words were not heeded in a focused, deliberate and intentional way, you would've been killed by Syrian legions hired by Titus and the Roman Empire to "level" Jerusalem.

And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down ("level you" NASB) to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation." (Luke 19:41-44)

- G. Instead of defining the views in their clinical theological terms I want to present them as they are most commonly presented on a "street level." That is, most people don't discuss eschatology or the book of Revelation in context to what scholars and commentators say; they discuss the issues the best way they can.

- H. Most of the people that we know hold one of these views. And they don't define them in strict theological terminology. They define it by saying things like "We aren't going to be here when the Great Tribulation comes" (**Pre-Tribulation Rapturism**) or "The book of Revelation was fulfilled in 70 AD" (**Preterism**) or "You aren't supposed to take the book literally! It's symbolic!" (**Amillennialism**). Instead of attempting to address these views within the confines of theological banter I'm going to address them at a street level by showing **the glorious alternative** to the values that under-gird the broad confessions that so many of our friends and family hold (like "Get ready! We could be raptured any minute!").

- I. The most common error that pervades the Western church is the assumption that we cannot know the hour of Jesus' return and mustn't (citing Matthew 24:36 out of context). I've not counted this in the three. We have already dealt with this issue and will continue to deal with it so we won't focus on it in this session. The prophets and apostles – and the Lord Jesus Himself – were very clear: We are required to know the hour of His coming.



- J. The three views that we'll be addressing are:
1. The *Escapist View/Secret Rapture View* of the **Pre-Tribulation Rapture**
 2. The *Historical Fulfillment View* of **Preterism**
 3. The *Symbolic View* of **Amillennialism**

III. THE ESCAPIST VIEW/SECRET RAPTURE VIEW (PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURISM)

- A. The first view, and probably the most common one, is the idea of a secret rapture. Proponents of this view argue that Jesus will rapture the church prior to the Great Tribulation. They agree that we will be gone before the final 3 ½ years but disagree over whether we're raptured at the 7 year mark or at the 3 ½ year mark.
- B. There are three things to keep in mind when considering this view:
1. **There are four verses in the whole Bible that explicitly speak about the rapture and none of them remotely allude to a secret rapture.** All four say that it occurs at the 7th trumpet; or the "last trumpet." If there is a secret rapture, the Biblical foundation for it cannot be found in any of the rapture verses but must be found outside of them and then projected onto them.
 2. **The idea of a secret rapture was not held or taught until the late 1800's** when a Scottish woman named Margret MacDonald had a vision about the end-times. She told her dream to leaders in the church and was told that it was unbiblical. Her view ended up ringing in the ears of two men who would leave a significant mark on Biblical theology. Their names were John Darby and C.I. Scofield. These men – being from England – were told that this new view was unbiblical and to be rejected. These men moved to the States where they published the "Scofield Study Bible" which remains one of the top selling Bibles in modern times.
 3. **The idea of the secret rapture is only held by those who were influenced by the Western world;** or, by those who were influenced by Scofield's Bible. The view is considered orthodox only in the Western world. And where it is accepted outside of the West is the direct result of



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Western influence. For example, China sent letters to the States asking the American church to quit sending them Pre-Tribulation teachers to them as it did not aid them in persecution. I was in Indonesia in 2005 right after the Boxing Day Tsunamis. Before preaching one morning I was told that could make no mention of a Pre-Tribulation rapture in my sermon as I was American and “American’s believe in a secret rapture.”

- C. As I said, **there are only four verses in the entire Bible that speak explicitly about the rapture**. Before bringing anything to the table we need to consider these four verses. (I am including a fifth verse pertaining to the 7th Trumpet for clarity sake) Note the language and the timing indicators in the following verses:

1. *“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 in Christ will be raised...” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)*
2. *“The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout with the voice of the archangel, and with **the Trumpet of God**. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16)*
3. *“Immediately **after the Tribulation of those days**...He will send His angels with a **Great Sound of a Trumpet**, and they will gather together His elect...” (Matthew 24:29-31)*
4. *“Concerning **the coming of our Lord and our gathering together [Rapture] to meet Him**....Let no one deceive you by any means; for **that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first**, and the **man of sin [Antichrist] is revealed**... (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3)*
5. *“...in the days of the sounding of **the Seventh Angel/Trumpet**, when He is about to sound, **the mystery of God would be finished**, as He declared it to His servants the prophets.” (Revelation 10:7)*



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- D. No rapture debate comes without the preacher employing his/her favorite proof texts. But that's exactly the problem. The problem with this issue is that people use too many proof texts that they shouldn't be using and distort the ones they should use. If we look at the verses at face value and identify their plain meaning we would be confident to say:

1. We are raptured At the **LAST Trumpet** (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)
2. We are raptured With **THE Trumpet of God** (1 Thessalonians 5:16)
3. We (the elect) are raptured **AFTER the Tribulation** at a **Great Trumpet** sound (Matthew 24:29-31)
4. We are raptured **AFTER the Falling Away** and **After the Revealing of the Antichrist** (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3)
5. When the **SEVENTH and LAST Trumpet** sounds the Mystery of God is complete (Revelation 10:7)

- E. The idea of a secret rapture is nonsensical for a multiplicity of peripheral reasons. But if we just look at the *only* passages in Scripture that speak about the event, we have an unequivocal statement that the rapture happens at the Last Trumpet which is also the Seventh Trumpet and that it occurs after the Tribulation and after the emergence of Antichrist and the Great Falling Away.
- F. The consequences of holding this view is being **unprepared** when the end-time events begin to break out, **offended** because the events are breaking out and **confused** because it's too difficult to figure out why God would allow us to be on the earth as the events are breaking out.
- G. The primary objection to the idea of the church's presence on the earth during the Great Tribulation is that "we can't be because God did not appoint us to wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9)!"

"For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ..." (1 Thessalonians 5:9)

1. This is true! We aren't destined to wrath! That's the glorious message of the Gospel of the cross of Christ. Jesus quenched the torrent of wrath



that burned against us. But the problem is, this verse has nothing to do with the Rapture.

2. The Great Tribulation is not divine wrath dispensed on the church. The Great Tribulation is divine wrath dispensed on the Antichrist *by the church*. We loose the tearing of the seals by prayer (Rev. 5:8-6:2), we release the trumpets by prayer (Rev. 8:1-5) and we release the bowls of wrath by prayer (Rev. 15).
 3. The church is on the earth for the Great Tribulation and is an active participant in the great end-time drama.
- H. The other main objection to the idea of the church's presence on the earth during the Great Tribulation is the idea that "the church is not described as being on the earth in the book of Revelation after chapter 4 when the rapture is." This idea is completely untrue. ***The following are 14 examples of the church's presence and involvement on the earth during the Great Tribulation.***
1. The great harvest of souls from all nations occurs during the tribulation. The Church will not be absent at the time of our greatest increase and effectiveness in evangelism.

Behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne...14 These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Rev. 7:9, 14)

This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come. (Matt. 24:14)
 2. The saints will overcome Satan and the Antichrist with great victory during the tribulation.

They overcame him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. (Rev. 12:11)



I saw...those who have the victory over the beast (Antichrist), over his image and over his mark...standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. (Rev. 15:2)

3. Some saints will be martyred during the tribulation. The Church must be on earth at that time.

For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets... (Rev. 16:6)

I saw the woman (Harlot Babylon), drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. (Rev. 17:6)

In her (Harlot Babylon) was found the blood of prophets and saints... (Rev. 18:24)

He has avenged on her (Harlot Babylon) the blood of His servants shed by her. (Rev. 19:2)

Rejoice...you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her! (Rev. 18:20)

How long...until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? 11...they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed. (Rev. 6:10–11)

I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast (Antichrist)... (Rev. 20:4)

4. Satan and the Antichrist will war against the saints during the tribulation.

The dragon (Satan) was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. (Rev. 12:17)

It was granted to him (Antichrist) to make war with the saints...10 Here is the patience and the faith of the saints. (Rev. 13:7, 10)



Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. 13...Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. (Rev. 14:12–13)

5. The 144,000 Jewish servants of God are followers of Jesus.

Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads...4 One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed... (Rev. 7:3–4)

One hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads...3 were redeemed from the earth. 4 These...follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. (Rev. 14:1–4)

They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. (Rev. 9:4)

6. The saints' prayers during the tribulation will release the trumpet judgments.

Another angel...was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints...4 The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. (Rev. 8:3–5)

7. Jesus comes back to earth in answer to the prayer of saints crying out for His return.

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!" (Rev. 22:17)

8. Prophetic ministry will increase greatly during the tribulation (Rev. 11:3–6, 10, 18; 16:6; 18:20, 24; 22:6–9; Joel 2:28–32; Acts 2:17–21; Eph. 4:13; Dan. 11:33–35; 12:10). The seven thunders prophecies were sealed in John's generation with the intention of being released during the tribulation to the end-time prophets.



When the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them." (Rev. 10:4)

9. The two witnesses or prophets will be born-again believers.

I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy 1,260 days... (Rev. 11:3)

These two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. (Rev. 11:10)

10. Calculating the number of the Antichrist will only be relevant to those living in the tribulation.

Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666. (Rev. 13:18)

11. Believers who watch until the time of the bowl judgments (Rev. 16) will be blessed instead of suffering loss at the time of Jesus' Second Coming.

Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." (Rev. 16:15)

12. Only those on earth during the events prophesied by John are in a position to keep the prophecy.

Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." (Rev. 22:7)

13. An angel commands God's people to leave Babylon just prior to her final judgment in Rev. 18.

I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. (Rev. 18:4)

14. Jesus' bride is prepared in the context of the final judgment of Babylon during the tribulation (Rev. 19:1-10). An angel revealed to Daniel that the saints would be purified during the pressures of the tribulation (Dan. 11:33–35; 12:10)



For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. 8 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. (Rev. 19:7)

Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly...but the wise shall understand. (Dan. 12:10)

IV. THE HISTORICAL FULFILLMENT VIEW (PRETERISM)

- A. One of the most damaging views within the Body of Christ is the idea that the events in the book of Revelation were fulfilled in 70 AD with the destruction of Jerusalem under the leadership of Titus. This view is growing immensely and is gaining considerable influence.
- B. The view is technically called “Preterism;” they are called “Preterists.” A “Preterit verb” is a word that communicates that which is past tense. The book of Revelation is a *past tense prophecy* in their view; hence the term “Preterist.”
- C. There are three primary reasons that people feel compelled to embrace this view:
 1. They think it strange for God to send a prophecy to 7 historical churches in Asia Minor about events that would occur at the end of the age.
 2. They believe that anticipating an age-ending crisis averts our attention and energy from our mandate in the here and now. Many leaders of the “emergent church” ¹ are now advocating this position in view of issues the church’s apparent disengagement with things like the environment and government. They feel that a futuristic interpretation of the book encourages a pessimistic mentality that fosters disengagement and negativity.
 3. They find it too costly to embrace the idea of a coming hour of global crisis that culminates in the literal splitting of the skies and a violent battle procession from heaven’s courts through the Middle East and into

¹ Men like Brian McLaren have openly criticized the idea of a future literal second coming in hopes that the church would engage with issues like global warming.



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Jerusalem. The stigma attached to the book of Revelation makes it easy for them to “believe” that it has already been fulfilled. It’s too embarrassing to hold to a literal return and a literal Millennial reign.

- D. One of the intellectual hurdles that people can’t get over is the question of “If this vision was intended for the final generation in church history, why was it given to the first generation in church history?” The assumption is “If it was a revelation that was meant for the final generation it has no relevance to the first generation or any generation in between.
1. George Ladd explains the invalidity of this assumption by saying: “This is an argument [*of relevance*] which cannot be pressed too far, or else it will *empty many of the Old Testament prophecies of any relevance*. The prophets spoke not only of contemporary events; they constantly related contemporary historical events to the last great event at the end of history: the Day of the Lord when God will visit His people to redeem them and to establish His Kingdom. This brings us to a characteristic of Old Testament prophecy which is also characteristic of the Revelation and which solves this problem of distance and relevance. As we have just pointed out, the prophets had two foci in their prophetic perspective: the events of the present and immediate future, and the ultimate eschatological event. *These two are held in dynamic tension often without chronological distinction, for the main purpose of prophecy is not to give a program or chart of the future, but to let the light of the eschatological fall on the present (2 Peter 1.19).*”²
- E. **The greatest flaw of this view** is the fact that none of the events contained in the book of Revelation were even remotely fulfilled in the first century.
- F. **The next greatest flaw with this view** is the fact that it changes the book’s genre from being prophecy to being history (and poorly recorded history). The book was written in the 90’s during the reign of “Domitian.” This is decades after the rise of Nero in the 60’s and the fall of Jerusalem in the 70’s. Not only would that make it historical and not prophetic but it would also mean that the book demands far less respect; because the discrepancy between what happened in history and what John saw is incalculable.

² George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*



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1. The scope and impact of the judgment events
 2. The dramatic nature of the rise and fall of “the beast”
 3. The global sifting of the people of God
 4. The second coming of Jesus
- G. To affirm that the events contained in the book of Revelation were fulfilled in the first century is also to affirm these four statements:
1. ***God is Inaccurate in His Predictions of the Future*** in that Christ did not return, the oppressive empire was not overthrown, the Kingdom of God was not established “on the earth,” and none of the events described in the Seals, Trumpets or Bowls can accurately, sensibly, logically or indisputably be linked to ***any*** historical or current event. In a sentence, if this is the Lord’s prophecy concerning the first century, *He missed it.*
 2. ***God is Ineffective in Strengthening His people*** in that church history unanimously tells us that the Book was written between 81 and 96 B.C. This means that God gave the “prophecy” some 20-30 years after the so called rage of “Nero the Beast from the Sea (A.D. 64)” held sway over “every tribe and tongue” during his tyrannical reign. This then puts God two or three decades late in telling His people about what was about to happen. The argument that it was written primarily and even solely for these 7 historical churches as a warning to strengthen and encourage the church going through the persecution led by Nero is a faulty one in that it was written decades after the events occurred serving no purpose for those under the rule of Nero the alleged “Beast” of chapter 13.
 - a. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in Gaul in the second century wrote, “It (The Revelation) was seen not very long ago, almost in our generation, at the close of ***the reign of Domitian*** (81-96 A.D).”
 - b. Victorinus wrote in the third century, “When John said these things he was on the island of Patmos, condemned to the mines by ***Caesar Domitian.***”
 - c. “Another ***serious difficulty*** to the earlier dating (60’s A.D.) is the earthquake that destroyed Laodicea, one of the seven cities



addressed in Revelation, in A.D. 60 or 61. Evidence indicates that the earthquake had long-term effects on the area. Laodicea was deeply involved in reconstruction for the rest of Nero's reign and shortly thereafter. The possibility of the existence of a city, much less a relatively degenerate church in that city, during the 60s is highly questionable. Gentry's (*a scholar who is of the few to challenge the historical dating of the book*) attempted rebuttal of this argument (pp. 319-22) is again far-fetched.”³

- d. The theory associated with an early dating of the book assumes and concludes that there was foreseen “...an imminent world-wide persecution of the church by Rome (Rev. 13-1-18). The church was about to face practical annihilation (Rev 12-13); to steel God’s people in the face of their trials, John wrote to assure them that though they must expect to suffer, the coming of the Lord was at hand to *overthrow Rome* and to deliver his church. **The problem with this theory is that there is no evidence that during the last decade of the first century there occurred any open and systematic persecution of the church....**It is true that widespread persecution was promoted by Decius, Valerian, and Diocletian, but earlier persecutions were local in character or relatively mild in execution. Nero did indeed instigate a vigorous if brief persecution on Christians, but only in Rome and on a single occasion. **The alleged persecution by no means was empire-wide but was directed against a few families in Rome.**” (George Eldon Ladd)
 - e. Clearly the message of the Book was meant to strengthen the believers in the 1st century. The issue though is over the nature of that encouragement. The reality of the ultimate and final world crisis was to encourage them in their regional, local and historical one.
 - f. It’s interesting that no one challenged the dating of the Book until recently. This does not mean that church leaders have been extremely gullible for 2,000 years but that it has been historically documented as being written in the 90’s.
3. **God is Extremely ambiguous, vague and unconcerned with specificity in His communication.** That is, definitive terms, phrases and realities were shown to John that spoke of world-wide events that would have impact on the entire earth in an ultimate way. To say that the events took place

³ Robert L. Thomas, *Commentary on the Book of Revelation*



already is to say that God cares not about communicating truths in any sort of sensible, logical, or understandable manner. Instead He has chosen to speak of isolated historical events of an un-ultimate kind by using completely different language that in no way resembles those historical events. In other words there is nothing in the chronological sections or the parenthetical sections that can be obviously linked to anything in history (without completely manipulating and distorting the text to fit fringe and obscure events like the sinking of the Titanic and the existence of certain diseases) making God a horrible communicator.

4. ***God is guilty of excessive exaggeration.*** Some people would call this “lying.” Why? - Because He employs radical language to speak of events that do not match up in any way shape or form on a historical plane. For instance (*Just one example*):

5 And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. 6 Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. 7 It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. 8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. (Rev. 13.5-8)

- a. There is a clear period of 42 months – *it is either historic or prophetic.*
- b. In order for it to be historic we must then say with confidence that the Roman Emperor Nero waged war on “every tribe, tongue and nation” as well as received the “worship of all who dwelt on the face of the earth” for 42 months. No one can honestly say this without willingly ignoring the text and history altogether.
- c. In Revelation 19 the Beast is destroyed *at the Coming of Jesus* forcing us to conclude its sure future fulfillment. Nero died alone and pathetic; not at the splitting of the skies at the return of Jesus.

V. THE SYMBOLIC/NEBULOUS VIEW (AMMILLENNIALISM)

- A. This view can be summed by saying that those who hold it end up saying that the book of Revelation is fulfilled by anything from the Titanic sinking to 9-11 to the



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Anthrax scare to “global warming.” Most that advocate Reformed Theology fall into this pit of exegetical disaster. I advocate Reformed Theology just as these men do. The error though in many Reformed circles is to project a bunk hermeneutic onto literally *hundreds* of chapters to keep consistent with the fathers of their tradition. Men like Augustine have done incalculable damage to the studying of eschatology. I love Augustine! His soteriology is brilliant! But o how he distorted eschatology for so many.

- B. This camp is adamant that a straight forward approach to the book is lunacy and that there are no literal realities behind the apocalyptic imagery.
1. The greatest weakness of this theology is ***flaming inconsistency***. They employ a literal hermeneutic to every other area of theology (soteriology, ecclesiology, etc.) while attempting to use another one for eschatology.
 2. They will often say things like “You don’t read an Atlas or a history book like you would read Shakespeare – they’re different genres.” While that is true, the analogy runs aground in that the imagery and poetry of the apocalyptic books and passages are all interpreted by Scripture as being literal events that precede the Day of the Lord at the end of the age.
 3. So while we don’t approach a book however we want, and while we need to take genre into consideration, it’s clear from the prophet, apostles and Jesus that the imagery and symbolism isn’t meant to be ethereal and ambiguous to us but is designed to help our hearts connect with the literal realities that will break out at the end of the age.
 4. Let’s remember that there are only 7 symbols in the book that need to be interpreted. And let’s remember that the 7 are interpreted by the angel in the text itself.
 - a. **Dragon:** Satan
 - b. **Woman with a Male Child:** Elect Remnant of Ethnic Jews and Jesus
 - c. **Beast:** Antichrist
 - d. **Another Beast:** False Prophet
 - e. **Harlot Babylon:** A Global End-Time Demonized Religious and Financial network
 - f. **Seven Heads:** Seven Empires that Persecuted Ethnic Israel
 - g. **Ten Horns:** A 10 nation confederacy of nations in the Middle East (Ez. 38-39)



- B. This is a haphazard approach to the book where any past or current event can be what is meant in the book. I use the word “Nebulous” because the method of interpretation is vague, hazy, undefined and unarticulated. **Because the book is “symbolic” and “allegorical” the interpretation of those symbols are open to any and all to decide what they think it mean.** That’s why virtually no Amillennialists agree with each other.
- C. The result of this view is widespread disagreement. One commentator says that the fact that there is no sea in the age to come means that there is “no denominations in eternity” whereas another says that “it is symbolic of national boundary lines” whereas another says “it is symbolic of the Gospel going forth to all nations at the end” whereas another says “it means in the age to come there will be no ocean.” Nearly every verse in Revelation is defined differently by those who say that no literal reality is behind the symbolism.
- D. The book of Revelation mustn’t be defined as being “literal” or “symbolic.” That’s very unhelpful. Here’s why: If God speaks to His people through a symbol, they can and must be sure that that symbol points to a literal, cold, hard reality. There is no symbol in Scripture that does not point us to a literal reality.
- E. Therefore, we shouldn’t call the book “literal” or “symbolic.” We should say “we approach the book at face value.” That is, every symbol points to a reality. And every reality can be spoken of by a clear symbol.
1. Example: In Revelation chapter 4 we read that God the Father sits on a Throne that is surrounded by an “emerald rainbow.” We read that He looks like “a sardius and a jasper stone.” Now, we aren’t meant to teach people that God is a sardius and a jasper stone. Those stones came into John’s mind to help describe what he literally saw. The literal reality that is behind that radiant diamond looking “jasper stone” is the transcendence of God in all His holiness as He sits surrounded by light. The literal reality that is behind that fiery red “sardius stone” is the burning heart of God. The stone looks like fire. And the Scriptures compare God to a “jealous husband” who has “fire in His eyes” and who is a “consuming fire.”



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2. Every symbol in the book of Revelation is ***either interpreted in the same context, OR is interpreted by Scripture elsewhere OR common sense.***
- F. The amillennialist camp is guilty of some of the most horrendous distortion of the Scriptures in church history. We do not honor the book of Revelation by rendering the symbols “unknowable” and so nebulous that the common believer cannot conclude what they mean.

