

# The Book of Revelation and the flow of history in the Bible

“apocalyptic” literature (also parts of Daniel and Ezekiel)

- meaningful but highly symbolic.
- in most cases the symbolism is explained to us.
- much of the symbolism in Revelation is from Old Testament references

standard number symbolism

3: Trinity, deity (including evil false deity)

4: creation (four corners of earth, four beasts, etc.)

6: evil (one short of 7)

7: perfection, completeness (Sabbath)

10: many, large (often amplified to 100, 1000, 10000, etc.)

12: church (12 tribes, 12 apostles)

e.g.  $144,000 = 12 \times 12 \times 1000$ : the vast church of history

$1260 \text{ days} = 42 \text{ months} \times 30 \text{ days} = 7 \text{ years} \times 12 \text{ months} \div 2 = 3.5 \text{ years}$

(period of desecration of Antiochus): “the time of trampling of the Temple”

## **Main focus of Revelation:**

### **Exalted view of Jesus the Christ**

chapter 1: **beautiful vision of Christ**

chapters 2-3: letters to 7 churches from Christ

each refers back to some attribute from chapter 1 vision

theme is endurance, faith that Christ is on the throne

chapters 4-5: **worship of Christ**

chapters 6: seven seals (Christ opens the seals as Lord of history)

chapter 7: **worship of Christ**

(those in Christ are protected, shown in heaven)

chapters 8-11: seven trumpets

sovereignty of Christ even over end times as history is ended

witnesses to Christ are killed but resurrected

11:15-19: **worship of Christ**

chapters 12-14: evil trinity, time of persecution of the church

(dragon and two evil beasts = devil, beast of sea and land)

ends with call to endurance and hope in Christ

chapter 15: **worship of Christ**

chapters 16-18: seven bowls of plagues: destruction of the two evil  
beasts

chapter 19: **worship of Christ**

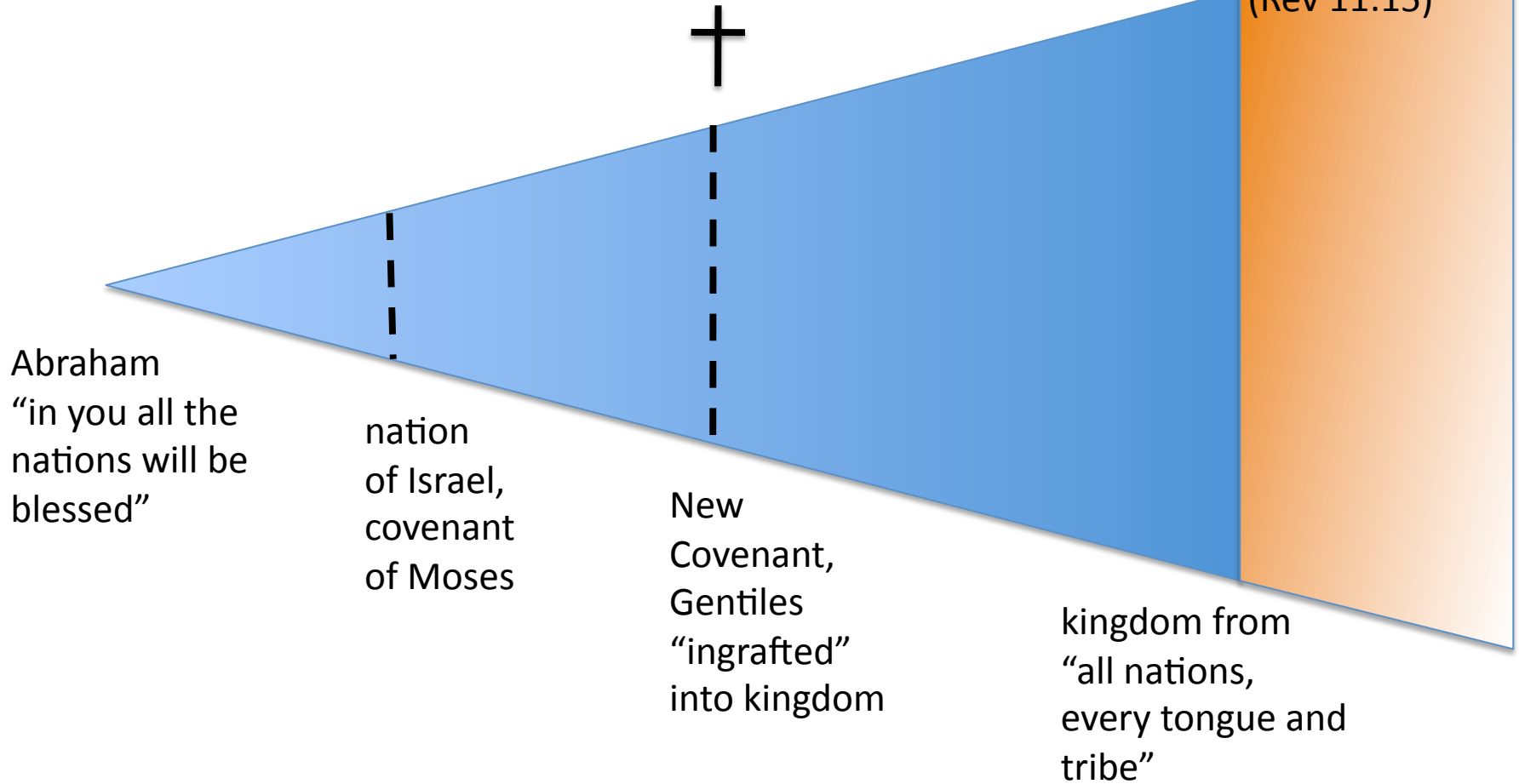
chapters 20-21: the end of all time, the final judgment and final glory

“big picture”:

- there is a goal to history, we are going somewhere
- evil will have its day but God will triumph, therefore we are patient and endure
- Jesus is sovereign over all history: we endure by looking to him

“Of the increase  
of his government...  
there will be no end”  
(Isaiah 9:7)

“the kingdom of this  
earth has become the  
kingdom of our Lord.”  
(Rev 11:15)



“This Gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the world... and then the end will come”(Matthew 24:14)

## **Paul, 1 Corinthians 15:21-26**

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put "all things in subjection under his feet."

## **Four general approaches to history and Revelation**

“millenium” appears in Rev 20: saints reign until end of 1000 years, then Satan is released briefly to lead a rebellion, and is judged.

### **1. Classic Premillennialism**

The millenium is a period in the future after Christ returns, when he rules but does not yet finally judge.

Focus on evangelism only, everything in this world is “brass on the Titanic”

### **2. Dispensational Premillennialism**

The millenium is a period in the future after Christ returns, when Israel is set up as a nation. Before this period there is another period called the “tribulation” when Christians are removed from the world. (Three “comings” of Christ).

### **3. Amillennialism**

The millenium is now, Christ is ruling with his saints on high. General focus on evangelism but with long-term vision.

### **4. Postmillennialism**

The millenium is a period in the future when the Church conquers this world and rules, before Christ returns.

General focus on power and culture in this world

## **The debate of Futurism vs. Preterism**

### **1. Futurism**

Most of Revelation, Christ's prophecies, and OT prophets deal with times future to us, very distant from 1<sup>st</sup> century

### **2. Partial Preterism**

Much of Revelation, Christ's prophecies and some of OT prophecies deal with destruction of Temple in 70 AD.

### **3. "Full" Preterism, or "Hyper"-Preterism**

A extreme and heretical view which takes all of the prophecies as fulfilled in 70 AD. No future judgment, no resurrection of the body. An extreme form of post-millennialism in which this world merges into heaven with no further return of Christ.

The case for at least partial futurism:

Rev 6:14 “The sky vanished like a scroll...every mountain and island was removed.”

First 5 seals are normal temporal judgments in this world (“birth pangs”), but the sixth is the beginning of the end. The seven trumpets and seven bowls are expansions of this end time.



The case for partial preterism:

- Some apocalyptic imagery is taken symbolically by the apostles, e.g. in Acts 2 Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32, “I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood”

Counter-argument: these things happened at the crucifixion of Christ

- Revelation 17-18 is clearly about Rome. (City on “seven hills” in 17:9, in 17:10-11 seven kings (five fallen, sixth at time of writing, one more to stay just a short time) + an eighth king dates book at eighth emperor which is Vespasian, who destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple)

Counter-argument: Revelation 17-18 is about Rome, but can be taken as an “archetype” of the evil city/power of this world.

## Emperors of Rome

Julius 48-45 BC

- |                           |                                 |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Augustus 27 BC - 14 AD | 23 BC first official “emperor”  |
| 2. Tiberius 14-37 AD      |                                 |
| 3. Gaius/Caligula 37-41   |                                 |
| 4. Claudius 41-54         |                                 |
| 5. Nero 54-68             | 64 AD persecutes Christians     |
| 6. Galba 68-69            |                                 |
| Otho 69 (8 weeks)         | not widely accepted as emperor? |
| 7. Vitellus 69 (8 mos.)   |                                 |
| 8. Vespasian 69-79        | 70 AD son destroys Jerusalem    |

Taking partial preterist view dates Revelation at Galba (sixth king who “now is”) pre- 70 AD. All prophecy closed with end of kingdom of Israel.

Alternative view: John a very old man ca. 95 AD under persecution of Domitian. Some church tradition for this.

The case for partial preterism:

Clearly much of the prophecy of Jesus is about the destruction of the Temple.

“So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.” (Matthew 24:15-22)

“Abomination of Desolation” clearly refers to desecration of Temple, akin in destruction in 167 BC.

The time period is clearly not the end of history since it is “cut short” and they are to flee to live another day.

Jesus clearly preached “impending judgment” coming soon on Israel.  
Revelation 22:20 “I am coming soon.”

## Key elements of Revelation and end times prophecy

### *“The birth pangs”*

Luke 21:5-9

And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, “As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” And they asked him, “Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?” And he said, “See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is at hand!’ Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”

Wars, tumults etc. are not signs that Jesus is returning soon

Matthew 24:5-8

“See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.”

Luke 21:10-19

Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

“But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.”

## Revelation 6: the seven seals

1. white horse: tyranny

2. red horse: war

3. black horse: famine

4. pale horse: plague

5. martyrs



standard things of history

6. final judgment: sky rolled up, mountains removed  
everyone hides  
“the day of wrath has come”

7. shalom (Rev 8:1)

## *“The time of trampling”*

Luke 21:20-24

“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

Matthew 24:15-22

“So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains....

Clearly a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, followed by a time in which Jerusalem is “trampled”.

Matt. 21:43 “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.”

Matt. 22:1-7

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.’ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.”

Rom. 11:25

Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.



Rev. 11: 1-3

Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, “Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”

$$1260 = 42 \times 30 = 3.5 \times 12 \times 30$$

Rev. 12:1-6

And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

Rev. 13:5 And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months.

The woman in labor is Israel/the kingdom of God. Jesus is the son who will “rule the nations with a rod of iron” (Psalm 2)

She is “on the run” for 42 months while the beast exercises apparent authority.  
= the people of God during the trampling of Jerusalem

*“The angels with their trumpets”*

Matthew 24:27-31

“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. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Contrast: Do not be deceived by false Christs, because the return of the Son will be unmistakable.

There is only one dramatic return of Christ discussed in Scripture.

### 1 Thess 4:16-17

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.

## **Revelation 8: the seven trumpets**

1. hail and fire: 1/3 of earth burned up
2. mountain thrown down, 1/3 of sea destroyed
3. star falls from heaven, 1/3 of waters destroyed
4. sun and moon struck, 1/3 of light removed

note parallel with 6<sup>th</sup> seal of Rev. 6: stars and mountains fall down,  
sun and moon struck

5. Satan (“star fallen from heaven”) given key to bottomless pit:  
demons in chains released

6. massive battle

7. Shalom (Rev 11:15)

Trumpets 5 and 6 parallel Rev. 20:7-10: Satan released from prison, marches in war.

## “The Antichrist”

2 Thess 2:3-12

Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. ... The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

There is a time of the end in which Satan will be “released” and lead the nations astray— for a short time.

Paul, like Jesus, warns not to assume we are in end times: you can't miss it!

**Revelation 16:** Seven bowls of final full wrath, not just 1/3 destroyed but all.

The final state in Revelation is the “consummation of the City of God”  
Every tear wiped away, walking with God.

“History begins in a garden but ends in a city.”