

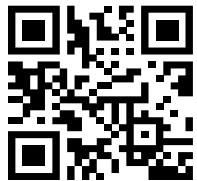
# Better Together HOME CHURCH

## FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

General “ice breaker” questions

1. Read again Revelation 20:1-10. What do you find interesting and why?
2. This 1000 years mentioned has been viewed in several ways. What do you see as the strengths of each way of seeing it?
3. The millennium is only mentioned once and in a book full of imagery. Why would someone be tempted to make this more important than say, the belief in the resurrection or, the call to live in love as learned through Jesus, which is everywhere in the New Testament?
4. ReRead 1 Corinthians 15:34-39. Initial thoughts? The resurrection and recreation of our bodies in the world to come, tells us that God loves and uses what he has made now and includes it in our new world—bodies for everyone. How is this different or similar from what you have been taught in church, in other religions, in “secular” cultures?
5. How can we learn to better “agree and disagree” in love on things we find disagreement on?

<https://www.mennoniteusa.org/resource-portal/resource/agreeing-and-disagreeing-in-love/>



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# Better Together THE END IS THE BEGINNING

As we learn of the core things surrounding the return of Christ, we'll look at three views of "the Millennium"—what can we all agree on and what should clearly be labelled as secondary.

**1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:34-39; Colossians. 3:4, 1 John 2:28, 3:2; Roman 8:23**

## TAKE OFF

*“In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, love.”  
(Comenius, Unum Necessarium, 1668).*

## NAB STATEMENT OF FAITH

**9. We believe God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring all things to their appropriate end and establish the new heaven and the new earth** (Ephesians 1:9–10, Revelation 21:1). The certain hope of the Christian is that Jesus Christ will return to the earth suddenly, personally, and visibly in glory according to His promise (Titus 2:13; Revelation 1:7; 3:11; John 14:1–3). The dead will be raised, and Christ will judge mankind in righteousness (John 5:28–29). The unrighteous will be consigned to the everlasting punishment prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41, 46; Revelation 20:10). The righteous, in their resurrected and glorified bodies, will receive their reward and dwell forever with the Lord (Philippians 3:20–21; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18).



## FLIGHT

### II. Spectrum of End Times Beliefs

#### Some Key Words/Ideas:

- Eschatology ἔσχατος
- Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, Amillennialism, Moderate Preterism.  
\*The current religious term “premillennialism” did not come into use until the mid-19th century.
- Dominionism, Dispensational-Premillennialism
- Rapture (two-stage vs. one-stage)
- Imminent return
- Παρουσία παρουσία
- Maranatha Μαράνα θά
- Civil religion - Babylon - Rome
- The Beasts - Mark of the Beast
- The Lamb

#### Where all orthodox evangelical Christians are united

1. Jesus will...

2. The General, bodily

3. All believers will

#### What orthodox Christians reject:

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*Justin Martyr (2nd Cent) on premillennial view, “...Many who belong to the pure and pious faith and are Christians think otherwise” (Grenz, Millennial Maze, 39).*

### Three views of Millennium

1. Premillennialism - “Return before the Reign”

2. Postmillennial - Working toward and Waiting for a Coming Reign of Peace  
Postmillennial view

3. Amillennial View - The Symbolic Thousand-Year Conquest of Satan

### III. THE REDEMPTION OF OUR BODIES AND HOPE

If I were to have you read **one** End Times book:

Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, The Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church

If I were to have you read **two** End Times books:

Reading Revelation Responsibly - Uncivil Worship and Witness, Following the Lamb into the New Creation, Michael Gorman.

### LAND THE PLANE

### FINAL WORD

Q&A Sunday next week

Sources for Further Study and Used Today

<https://bibleproject.com/podcast/five-strategies-reading-revelation/> ; <https://blog.logos.com/4-views-of-the-end-times/> ; <https://ntwrightpage.com/2016/07/12/farewell-to-the-rapture/> ; <https://www.ntwrightonline.org/modern-myth-paul-and-the-end-of-the-world-video/> ; <https://academic.logos.com/covid-19-and-the-mark-of-the-beast/> ; <https://www.christiansandthevaccine.com/> ; Reading Revelation Responsibly, Michael Gorman; Surprised by Hope, NT Wright; I Was In the Spirit on the Lord's Day, Melissa Archer; The Millennial Maze- Sorting Out Evangelical Options, Stanley J. Grenz; Across The Spectrum - Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology, 2nd Ed., Gregory A. Boyd, Paul R. Eddy; Various Revelation Commentaries: NT Wright, NIVAP.

19 SEPT 2021

Reading Revelation Responsibly - Uncivil Worship and Witness Following the Lamb into the New Creation, Michael J. Gorman, Pg 63-68.

## APPROACHES TO REVELATION

Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland are scholars of the history of Revelation's interpretation and impact. They suggest that there are two ends of a wide interpretive spectrum for the book of Revelation: the "decoding" pole and the "actualizing" pole. Decoding interpreters focus on details, looking for correlations between the text and specific events and people (later events and people in church history and/or in their own time), while actualizing interpreters seek to "convey the spirit of the text" and to "perform" it in new circumstances. Every interpretation of Revelation, Kovacs and Rowland contend, falls somewhere between these two poles of the spectrum. We may also refer to these two poles as a hermeneutic (interpretive strategy) of correspondence and a hermeneutic of analogy.

Kovacs and Rowland also suggest something that others have noted as well: interpreters of Revelation tend to focus on the past, the present, or the future in their reading of Revelation. Some, in other words, think that it should be read primarily or exclusively as an ancient document for the ancient church, some see it as a text that speaks above all to us today (that is, to any age, because its message is timeless), and some see it fundamentally as a set of predictions about the future. Few interpreters, however, would rule out the relevance of the time period that is not their own focus; even popular interpreters like Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye see Revelation as a text relevant both to the first century and to our time (indeed for all time), even if it primarily tells us about the future tribulation and associated events.

If we put these two simple systems of classifying approaches to Revelation together we can construct a graphic with an x-axis and a y axis on which we can plot interpreters' interests between decoding and actualizing strategies and among past, present, and future foci:

## FIVE INTERPRETIVE STRATEGIES

It is possible to expand still further the combination of these two helpful systems of classification-the decoding/actualizing axis and the past present/future axis-by suggesting that there are at least five primary interpretive strategies for Revelation being practiced today. (Most, if not all, of these are actually quite ancient in the history of interpretation. These approaches are not, however, mutually exclusive.

1. The first approach is the predictive approach, which is the most common approach to Revelation, focusing on the future. This approach is not, however, a recent invention; it goes

back to some of the earliest interpreters of Revelation, such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus in the second century and Victorinus in the third, who produced the first surviving commentary on Revelation. Throughout the centuries, many Christian interpreters have seen the fulfillment of the tribulations, the millennium, and/or the figures in Revelation in their own time or the very near future. "History is littered with failed attempts to use Revelation to predict history." Interest in decoding and correlating has been heightened before epochal moments (such as the years 1000 and 2000) and during turbulent political events, whether in the world or in the church.

We find this approach in two basic forms. Some interpreters are focused on history, seeing Revelation as a prediction of world or church history (at least Western history), usually culminating in or near the time of the interpreter. This is sometimes called the historicist or church-historical approach. In the Middle Ages, Joachim of Fiore (12th century) and Nicholas of Lyra (14th century) read Revelation as a sequential chart of church history. Their reading strategy influenced many later interpreters.

Most recent predictive interpreters are focused on eschatology, seeing Revelation as primarily concerned about the "end times." Sometimes called the futurist approach, it is obviously what is found in the many popular books, web sites, and other media that view Revelation as an advance DVD or blueprint of the end. The most common form of this approach today is dispensationalism, popularized especially by the Plymouth Brethren teacher J. N. D. Darby (1808-82), then by the Scofield Bible, then by Hal Lindsey (The Late Great Planet Earth), and most recently by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins (the "Left Behind" series). Dispensationalists, as we have noted, divide history into various ages, or dispensations, in the divine story; connect the tribulation of Revelation 6-19 with the 70th week in Daniel 9:25-27; and believe in a two-stage or double return of Jesus beginning with the "rapture" of the church, supposedly found in Rev 4:1 and elsewhere. This is a decoding approach to Revelation, with the interest being in connecting symbols in Revelation with later figures and events, especially ones contemporary with the interpreter. For example, Hal Lindsey suggested that the locusts in Revelation might be attack helicopters.

It should be noted that this approach can be very political. Not only have people sought to correlate Revelation's characters and events with political figures and situations, but at times the approach has directly influenced political strategy, as in the case of U.S. relations with countries in the Middle East.

2. The second approach is what we will call the preterist approach, which focuses exclusively on the past ("preterite" being a linguistic term for the past tense). Sometimes called the contemporary-historical approach, it is a non-theological academic approach that might use the historical-critical method of biblical studies, or perhaps socio-rhetorical methodology.

In either case, it views Revelation strictly as a document from and for its own time, a specimen of ancient religious literature. It developed in part as a reaction to futuristic readings. The interpreter may have no explicit interest in the alleged predictions, or even the ongoing relevance, of the text. Decoding is done to ascertain the meaning of symbols exclusively in the first century. Certain academic commentaries, such as the highly acclaimed three-volume work of David Aune, fall into this category.

The other three approaches focus on the present message of Revelation, or on its timeless character. By timeless, I do not mean that Revelation is full of vague generalities without theological teeth, but that it is timeless in the sense of always timely, a living and active word, always able to speak as powerfully and pointedly in a later context as in its original one. Each of these three timeless-but-always-timely approaches plays a significant role in this book.

3. The third approach we will call poetic, or theopoetic. Proponents of this approach contend that Revelation uses mythical and poetic language to express great truths about God, evil, history, and so on. It is sometimes called the idealist, spiritual, non-historical, timeless, or transtemporal approach. This approach has always been somewhat reactionary as well, responding to perceived interpretive abuses in a predictive approach but also to deficiencies in a purely historical reading. Church fathers such as Origen, the great third-century allegorical interpreter, and, to a lesser extent, Augustine (354-430), building on the work of an interpreter named Tyconius, reacted against futuristic interpretations.

More recently, Paul Minear called Revelation an "animated and impassioned dance of ideas," and J. P. M. Sweet said it was "more like music than rational discourse." Eugene Peterson labels it a "theological poem" that "does not call for decipherment" but "evokes wonder," and Richard Hays writes of its "theopoetic" language." Although these interpreters do not rule out historical study, they reject decoding approaches, whether preterist or futurist, as violations of the genre and language of Revelation. Thus this approach is not merely reactionary: it argues that the importance and truth of Revelation are not limited to its original connection with Rome and the particular historical context in which it was written, or to its alleged correlation with specific future realities.

4. The fourth approach can be called political, or theopolitical. This approach, for our purposes, does not refer to the political implications of predictive, dispensationalist interpretations but to a basic view of Revelation as a document of comfort and (especially) protest, to borrow words from the title of South African theologian Allan Boesak's interpretation of Revelation during the apartheid era: *Comfort and Protest* (1986). Similar book-length treatments have come from American activist Daniel Berrigan and South American liberation theologian Pablo Richard, while others have blended more

historical approaches with interpretations that focus on justice (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza) or anti-imperialism (e.g., Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther). Martin Luther King Jr. also turned to Revelation in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" and in sermons. The theopolitical approach may focus on criticizing injustice, promoting transformation and justice, or both.

5. The fifth approach can be termed the pastoral-prophetic approach. This approach views Revelation primarily as a document of Christian formation designed to call the church to faithfulness in the face of inevitable conflict with hostile powers. One commentator who combines this approach with careful historical work is Charles Talbert. He writes that Revelation functions in the interests of spiritual purity, single-minded devotion to God," or "first-commandment faithfulness. The commentaries of Gerhard Krodel and Robert Wall, among others, have a similar tone.

This pastoral-prophetic approach is bound to be closely related to the previous two. If we read Revelation poetically, concluding that Babylon is not merely Rome, as the preterists might, and is definitely not some future reconfiguration of the Roman Empire in modern Europe, as some futurists would say, then its seductive and oppressive power can be felt-and must be both named and resisted-in the political realities of our own day. These last three approaches are similar to one another in that they both go beyond mere correspondence to more timeless concerns about God, evil, empire, civil religion, and the like, responding to new situations.

Without ignoring the past or the future (in a general sense), the focus of this book is on Revelation as a word to the church in the present. We will therefore combine the (theo-)poetic, the (theo-)political, and the pastoral-prophetic approaches. We will do so by grounding our contemporary interpretation of Revelation in its message for the first century church, looking for contemporary analogies to first-century realities (as we did with the issue of civil religion in the last chapter), while always keeping an eye on the promises for the future of God's creation contained especially in Revelation 21-22. Unlike many traditional commentaries on Revelation, the focus of this book is on the big picture, not the details. For the details-the symbolic value of the many elements in the text, especially in their first-century context-consulting a good commentary is advisable. Although the meaning of Revelation should not be limited to its significance in its original context, understanding and building on that first, or most literal, sense is critical to responsible interpretation.