

Ways to Interpret Revelation

UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

DIFFERENT
APPROACHES

TO KEY TOPICS

SIMPLE
OUTLINE OF
SYMBOLS
AND EVENTS

CHART
COMPARES
VIEWS AT
A GLANCE

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GOD ACTING IN HISTORY

Both the Old and New Testaments reveal God as Lord over history. Christians of all eras have believed that Jesus will return a second time, but not all Christians have agreed that Revelation is all about the second coming. Whether the visions in Revelation have been, are being, or have yet to be fulfilled is a matter of debate, but the spirit of the last chapter calling on Jesus to come quickly is something all Christians can agree upon—“Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20)

Following is a comparison of four different approaches to the book of Revelation.

Four Views	How Revelation Is Viewed	More About This View
Historicist	The book of Revelation is prophecy about church history from the time of John to the end of the world.	Historicists view the events in Revelation as symbolic descriptions of historical events throughout church history. (Some futurists also understand the Seven Churches [Revelation 1–3] in a historic manner, treating each church as descriptive of a particular era of church history.)
Preterist	The book of Revelation is prophecy that was fulfilled primarily in the first century AD.	<i>“Partial Preterism”</i> views most of Revelation as prophecy fulfilled in the first century AD, though final chapters of Revelation describe future events to occur at the end of time. <i>“Full Preterists”</i> contend that the return of Jesus described in Revelation 19 was spiritual and occurred in AD 70. Preterists are typically <i>amillennialists</i> or <i>postmillennialists</i> , though some <i>historic premillennialists</i> might fit in this category.
Futurist	Revelation is prophecy primarily about the future end of the world.	In the futurist view, all or nearly all of Revelation is yet to occur. Revelation is a prophecy that describes the end of time and the years leading immediately to the end. Dispensational premillennialists as well as some historic premillennialists interpret Revelation in this way.
Idealist	Revelation is a non-historical and non-prophetic drama about spiritual realities.	This perspective seems to have originated among ancient Alexandrian theologians, who frequently spiritualized and allegorized biblical texts, but this view also has contemporary followers.

COMPARING VIEWS ON RE

Revelation	<p>Revelation 1:1 "soon" 1:3 "near" 1:19 "what is" (Compare, 22:6,7, 12, 20)</p>	<p>Revelation 2:1-3:22</p> <p>The Seven Churches of Asia Minor</p>	<p>Revelation 4:1-3</p> <p>God on His Throne</p>	<p>Revelation 5:1-4</p> <p>The Scroll</p>	<p>Revelation 6:1-17</p> <p>The Seals</p>
Historical View	<p>The prophecy began to be fulfilled close to the author's lifetime.</p>	<p>The prophecy begins with the seven actual churches in John's day and proceeds through history from there.</p> 	<p>God is about to outline his rule over history; the first part of that history is revealed under the vision of the seven seals.</p>	<p>The scroll is the coming history of the church as God reveals it and is Lord over it.</p>	<p>The seals are the stages of church history, perhaps describing the church from the late first century AD to the late fourth century.</p>
Preterist View	<p>Near, soon, and quickly are taken literally.</p>	<p>The prophecy begins with the seven actual churches of Asia Minor. It then focuses on the land of Israel before AD 70.</p>	<p>God's courtroom in the heavenly temple is the scene. The Judge on his throne is about to hold court.</p>	<p>The scroll is God's bill of divorce against unfaithful Israel.</p>	<p>The seals describe the Roman war with the Jews which lead to the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70).</p>
Futurist View	<p>These words refer to the whole of the "last days" or to the quickness with which Jesus will return.</p>	<p>The prophecy begins with the seven churches, which were actual churches in John's day and may also symbolize the types of churches present in the last days.</p>	<p>God gives John a vision from his throne of the events which are to take place "after these things."</p>	<p>The scroll is either the title deed to the earth or God's prophetic message in Revelation.</p>	<p>The seals begin to describe the great tribulation, with each opened seal leading to a greater tragedy upon the earth.</p>
Idealist View	<p>Christ is always at hand, near and quick to save his people.</p>	<p>The book begins with the seven churches, which symbolize tendencies in the church that can occur in every age.</p>	<p>God gives John the heavenly viewpoint of the important truths about his power over all things and his care for the church.</p>	<p>The scroll is God's last will and testament, revealing his salvation plan for all time.</p>	<p>The seals are about recurring evils throughout history and God's authority over them.</p>

VELATION

<p>Revelation 7:1-8</p> <p>The 144,000 (see p. 12)</p>	<p>Revelation 8:1-13</p> <p>The Trumpets</p>	<p>Revelation 9:13-19</p> <p>The Four Angels at the Euphrates</p>	<p>Revelation 10:8-11</p> <p>The Little Scroll</p>
<p>The 144,000 is a symbolic number that represents the entire church.</p>	<p>The trumpets are the stages of church history, perhaps from about AD 400 until the fifteenth century (or to the present).</p>	<p>The four angels represent the four principalities of the Turkish empire. The Turks destroyed the last of the Roman empire in AD 1453.</p>	<p>The little scroll is the Bible at the time of the Reformation. It was sweet to those starved for God's Word, but bitter to those who wanted to control its information and keep it from common people.</p>
<p>The 144,000 may be the Jewish Christians who escaped the destruction of Jerusalem.</p>	<p>The trumpets are a vision of the Roman war with the Jews in the first century AD and extend the seals' description in further detail.</p>	<p>The four angels may represent the four legions of Roman soldiers stationed in Syria that Vespasian led against the Jews (around AD 70). The colors mentioned are Roman military colors.</p>	<p>The little scroll is the same divorce bill as in Revelation 5:1-4 but now unsealed and empty of contents, indicating that the judgments against Israel are now occurring.</p>
<p>The 144,000 are Jewish Christians in the last days.</p>	<p>The trumpets describe the events of the tribulation in the last days.</p>	<p>The four angels represent the armies of the Orient that will march against Israel in the last days. They will cross the Euphrates as a signal of war.</p>	<p>The little scroll represents the divine plan for the end of the ages, showing that the Word of God is both sweet and bitter to God's prophets and messengers.</p>
<p>The 144,000 are the true spiritual Israel; the church on earth.</p>	<p>The trumpets are about the cycles of human sin, consequences, and God's salvation.</p>	<p>The four angels represent the judgment of God that comes on evil when there is no more restraint, which is represented by the river Euphrates.</p>	<p>The little scroll is the gospel, which must and will be preached to all "peoples, nations, tongues, and kings."</p>



<p>Revelation 11:1-2</p> <p>The Temple</p>	<p>Revelation 12:13-17</p> <p>The Persecuted Woman</p>	<p>Revelation 13:18</p> <p>666 (see "666," p. 12)</p>	<p>Revelation 14:14-16</p> <p>The Son of Man with the Sharp Sickle</p>
<p>The measuring of the temple, the altar, and those who worship there points to God's evaluation of the church, the doctrine of justification by faith, and what constitutes true membership in the church, all of which were issues at the Reformation.</p>	<p>The woman is the true church under persecution. The "third of the stars" may refer to the division of the Roman Empire under three emperors in AD 313, or it may refer to post-Reformation divisions in Europe.</p>	<p>It may be the number of the word <i>Lateinos</i> and so refers to the Latin or Roman Catholic pope/papacy.</p>	<p>It is a vision of the end of the age when Christ will come and gather his own to himself.</p>
<p>The measuring of the temple and its rooms, like the eating of the scroll in chapter 10, mirror what happens in Ezekiel 40-47. Both indicate the destruction of the temple and the separation of the faithful (symbolized by the sanctuary) from the unfaithful (symbolized by the court).</p>	<p>The woman is faithful Israel that gave birth to Christ (the Child). The Dragon, Satan, persecuted the Messianic church, but she escaped the destruction of Jerusalem by heeding Jesus' words (Luke 21:20-22) and fleeing to the desert hills (the prepared place).</p>	<p>It is the number that the letters in the name "Nero Caesar" add up to.</p>	<p>It is a vision of the coming of Christ to gather and preserve his church from the judgment that was to befall Jerusalem.</p>
<p>The measuring of the temple refers to the nation of Israel and the temple that will be rebuilt in the last days. Israel has been restored but still awaits the rebuilding of her faith. This faith will center on the new temple and will eventually lead some Jews to faith in Christ.</p>	<p>The woman is Israel (sun, moon and stars, Genesis 37:9). The Child is Christ (rod of iron, Psalm 2:9). The Dragon is Satan behind the coming Antichrist. As the head of the revived "Roman Empire," the Antichrist will attack Israel.</p>	<p>666</p> <p>It is the number of the future Antichrist—someone who will be like Nero back from the dead.</p>	<p>It is a vision of the coming harvest at the end of the age when Christ will separate the wicked for judgment.</p>
<p>The measuring of the temple and the leaving of the outer court indicates the division that has always been present between true believers and those who are Christians only in name. The trampling of the court signifies the way the unbelieving world corrupts the church, but this will only be for a short while.</p>	<p>The woman is Israel as the ideal symbol of all the faithful. The Child is Christ and the Dragon is Satan, the great persecutor of the Church in every age. The stars are the angels that fell with Satan at his rebellion. The seven heads and crowns speak of Satan's full political power and authority. The ten horns are military might.</p>	<p>It is the number of imperfection and human evil that leads to idol worship.</p>	<p>It is a vision of the last judgment and the coming of Christ at the end of the age.</p>



<p>Revelation 15:1-4</p> <p>The Song of Moses and of the Lamb</p>	<p>Revelation 16:10-11</p> <p>The Fifth Bowl</p>	<p>Revelation 17: 1-12</p> <p>The Great Prostitute</p>	<p>Revelation 18:9-24</p> <p>The Fall of Babylon (see "Babylon," p. 12)</p>
<p>The song of final salvation from the slavery of the Roman Catholic religious and political power known as the papacy.</p>	<p>The bowl is the judgment upon the Roman Pope Pius VI that occurred when the French revolutionary forces stripped the Vatican and took the Pope captive in 1798. The Pope was forced to flee Rome again in 1848. This event was actually predicted using 1260 days as years (12:6).</p>	<p>The prostitute is the corrupt Roman Catholic Church, including false "Protestant" churches that have come out of her. Her political and religious influence is carried by the beastly Roman papacy and Western European culture.</p>	<p>The destruction of Papal Rome (Babylon) will be complete and utterly devastating. The consequences of preaching a false gospel, persecuting true believers and dabbling in power politics will bring her to this end. Many will mourn her loss but it will be final.</p>
<p>The song of salvation from and victory over the ungodly religious and political persecution that Christians suffered in Israel and the Roman world.</p>	<p>The bowl is the judgment that fell upon Rome in AD 69. In that single year, Nero committed suicide, three emperors were deposed, civil war set Roman against Roman, and the Temple of Jupiter Capitoline was burned to the ground, causing darkness during the day.</p>	<p>The prostitute is Jerusalem. Her political and false religious influence is carried by the Roman Empire (Beast). The seven heads are Rome and the first seven emperors, Nero (the sixth of the emperors) ruling at that time. The ten horns are the ten imperial provinces.</p>	<p>The destruction of Jerusalem (Babylon) is sudden and complete. The misery and the economic disaster is nearly indescribable and a source of great despair. To this day, the temple has never been rebuilt.</p>
<p>The song of salvation from the last-days persecution of the Antichrist and resulting judgment of God. Believers may experience some persecution but they will not have to endure God's wrath.</p>	<p>The bowl is the coming judgment upon the revived Roman Empire that will happen in the last days.</p>	<p>The prostitute is the symbol of a false religious system, a new world religious order. The religious coalition will have political influence tied to the power of the Beast (Antichrist) who is the head of the alliance (ten horns) of ten nations in Europe in the last days.</p>	<p>The destruction of the coming world religious, political and economic system—under the control of the Antichrist and the False Prophet—will be a crash of unparalleled dimension.</p>
<p>The song of salvation that all the redeemed have sung throughout history and will sing anew when Christ comes again.</p>	<p>The bowl shows what will happen and does happen to those who steadfastly oppose God. The judgments of darkness and sores recall the plagues of Egypt.</p>	<p>The prostitute is all false and corrupt religion that has allied itself with political power in order to dominate. God warns that such religion shall come to an awful end when true faith triumphs.</p>	<p>The destruction of Babylon reveals that God's judgment is complete and final. Whether it is Nineveh, Babylon, Rome or any other economic power that opposes God, it is destined to fail.</p>

<p>Revelation 19:1-10</p> <p>The Marriage of the Lamb and His Bride</p>	<p>Revelation 20:1-15</p> <p>The Millennium (see "Views of the Millennium," p. 13)</p>	<p>Revelation 21:1-27</p> <p>The New Creation</p>	<p>Revelation 22:1-21</p> <p>The Salvation and Healing of the Nations</p>
<p>The entire removal of false religion represented by Rome/Babylon will leave the faithful to accomplish the purpose for which Christ came—the evangelization of the rest of the world. All people will be invited to come into relationship (the marriage feast with God).</p>	<p>The millennium is viewed as Christ's present, spiritual reign in the lives of his people (amillennialism).</p>	<p>The new creation will come with Christ at his second coming, yet there is a real sense in which it has already arrived in the believer's heart. Christians live now as citizens of the New Jerusalem.</p>	<p>It is happening now and will finally be completed when Christ returns.</p>
<p>The entire book has been about faithfulness using the image of marriage: the divorce bill in chapter 5, the imagery of the persecuted woman and the prostitute. The book builds toward the marriage feast of Christ and his church.</p>	<p>In partial preterism, the millennium may be Christ's literal reign on earth (premillennialism) or a spiritual reign (postmillennialism and amillennialism). In full preterism, the millennium refers to Christ's spiritual return and reign, beginning in the first century (amillennialism).</p>	<p>The new creation is now and future. Since the destruction of the old Jerusalem, Christians are building the New Jerusalem here and now, wherever the gospel is believed, as well as expecting it in full when Christ returns.</p>	<p>It will continue as the gospel grows and spreads throughout the world. Jesus will finalize and renew all things when he comes.</p>
<p>The entire church is the bride of Christ whose marriage is announced and celebrated. This scene refers to events near the end of the world and history.</p>	<p>The millennium is the future, physical reign of Jesus Christ on earth (premillennialism).</p> 	<p>The new creation will come when Christ comes again and ushers in the age to come.</p>	<p>It will continue until the great tribulation when the Antichrist will temporarily prevail. Christ in his second coming will triumph and usher in the final salvation and healing of all the faithful.</p>
<p>The entire sweep of sacred history may be seen through the lens of the ancient Jewish wedding tradition. The prophets announced the wedding. Jesus comes and betroths his bride (church), paying the dowry on the cross. When Jesus comes again, he will offer his bride a wedding feast.</p>	<p>The millennium is viewed as Christ's present, spiritual reign in the lives of his people (amillennialism).</p>	<p>The new creation is something God continually does with each new day. Yet there will come a day when Christ will personally return and make all things new.</p>	<p>It is what God has always been doing in the world—seeking and saving the lost. Christ will bring all things right when he returns.</p>

UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT

The book of Revelation is an exciting yet often misunderstood book of the Bible. It was probably penned between 35 and 65 years after Jesus' resurrection. This text became a source of hope and encouragement for Christians facing persecution.

This simple chart compares different ways Christians throughout the centuries have understood Revelation. Seeing the different approaches to Revelation at a glance will help clarify issues of interpretation and give new insight.

POINTS OF UNITY

Although the book of Revelation allows for many interpretations, all Christians seem to agree that:

1. The message of the book is relevant for Christians today, as it was for Christians in the times of the apostles;
2. The main purpose of the book is to provide *hope* and *encouragement* for believers of all times, especially in times of persecution or suffering;
3. The message of the book is clear on at least three points:
 - Christ is coming back and will judge humanity;
 - The powers of evil are doomed before Christ;
 - God promises a wonderful future for all who believe in Christ.



Seven Messages to Churches (Revelation 1:1–3:22)

INTRODUCTION (1:1–8)

Blessing 1

Vision of Christ

MESSAGES TO THE CHURCHES

1. EPHESUS

Praise: Hard work, perseverance

Criticism: Forgot first love

Exhortation: Repent

Reward: Right to eat from the tree of life

2. SMYRNA

Praise: You are rich!

Criticism: None

Exhortation: Be faithful

Reward: Not hurt by second death

3. PERGAMUM

Praise: Remain faithful

Criticism: Idolatry and sexual immorality

Exhortation: Repent

Reward: A white stone with a new name

4. THYATIRA

Praise: Deeds, love and faith, and perseverance

Criticism: Idolatry and sexual immorality

Exhortation: "Hold on to what you have until I come"

Reward: The morning star

5. SARDIS

Praise: None

Criticism: "You are dead"

Exhortation: Wake up

Reward: Be dressed in white, never blotted out from the book of life

6. PHILADELPHIA

Praise: Deeds and faithfulness

Criticism: None

Exhortation: Hold on to what you have

Reward: Become a pillar of the temple

7. LAODICEA

Praise: None

Criticism: You are lukewarm

Exhortation: Be earnest and repent

Reward: Will be seated with Christ





2 Seven Seals (Revelation 4:1–8:5)

Interlude:

Vision of Heaven (4:1–11)

Scroll with Seven Seals and the Lamb
(5:1–14)

Opening of Seals (6:1–8:5)

1. First Seal: White Horse—*Conqueror*
2. Second Seal: Red Horse—*No peace*
3. Third Seal: Black Horse—*Famine*
4. Fourth Seal: Pale Horse—*Pestilence*
5. Fifth Seal: Martyrs under the altar
6. Sixth Seal: Earthquake, sun black



Interlude:

144,000 sealed (7:1–8)
The Great Multitude
(7:9–17)

7. The Seventh Seal:

It contains seven angels with trumpets (8:1–2)

The angel with golden censer
(8:3–5)



3 Seven Trumpets (Revelation 8:2–11:19)

1. First Trumpet—Hail, fire, blood
 2. Second Trumpet—Fiery mountain in sea, 1/3 of sea becomes blood
 3. Third Trumpet—star falls on 1/3 of rivers
 4. Fourth Trumpet—1/3 of Sun, 1/3 Moon, 1/3 Stars
- Interlude:* Woe! Woe! Woe! (8:13)
5. Fifth Trumpet—Demon locust from the Abyss
 6. Sixth Trumpet—Two-hundred-million demonic riders from the Euphrates

Interlude (10:1–11:14)

The Little Scroll: Promise for the church

7. Seventh Trumpet—"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord..." (11:15)



4 Seven Symbolic Histories (Revelation 12:1-14:20)

The Woman and the Dragon

SYMBOLIC HISTORIES

1. **HISTORY OF THE DRAGON (12:7-12)**
Defeated
The “ancient serpent”
2. **HISTORY OF THE WOMAN (12:13-17)**
Persecuted by the dragon
Defended by God
3. **THE SEA BEAST (13:1-10)**
Ten horns and seven heads
Blasphemer
Has power to make war
4. **THE EARTH BEAST (13:11-18)**
Two horns
Deceiver
666—The number of the beast
5. **THE 144,000 (14:1-5)**
Marked with God’s name
Worshippers
6. **THE ANGELIC ANNOUNCERS (14:6-11)**
First angel: “Fear God”
Second angel: “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great”
Third angel: Warning against the mark of the beast
7. **THE HARVEST (14:14-20)**

5 Seven Bowls (Revelation 15:1-16:21)



Commissioning of the Seven Angels with the Last Seven Plagues (15:1-8)

The Seven Bowls

1. **First Bowl**—Painful sores
2. **Second Bowl**—Turns sea into blood
3. **Third Bowl**—Turns rivers and springs of water into blood
4. **Fourth Bowl**—Sun burns people with fire
5. **Fifth Bowl**—Plunges kingdom of the beast into darkness
6. **Sixth Bowl**—Dries up the Euphrates; Armageddon
7. **Seventh Bowl**—Judgment against Babylon. “It is done!”

Seven Messages of Judgment (Revelation 17:1–19:10)



Judgment against Babylon

Description of symbolic characters

1. **First angelic message** (17:7–18)
Explanation of the vision
2. **Second angelic message** (18:1–3)
Announcement of the fall of Babylon
3. **Third angelic message** (18:4–8)
Call to God's people; God's judgment on Babylon
4. **The kings of the earth** (18:9–10)
Lament for the fall of Babylon
5. **The merchants of the earth** (18:11–17)
Lament for the fall of Babylon
6. **The seafaring people** (18:18–19)
Lament for the fall of Babylon
Rejoice for God's judgment (18:20)
7. **Seventh angelic message** (18:21–24)
Announcement of the final destruction of Babylon

Seven Visions (Revelation 19:11–22:5)



1. **First Vision** (19:11–16)
Heaven opens and the white horse rider appears
2. **Second Vision** (19:17–18)
Angel invites birds to "the great supper of God"
3. **Third Vision** (19:19–21)
The beast and kings ready for war
4. **Fourth Vision** (20:1–3)
The thousand years (millennium)
5. **Fifth Vision** (20:4–10)
Thrones with judges and Satan's doom
6. **Sixth Vision** (20:11–15)
Judgment of the dead
7. **Seventh Vision** (21:1–22:5)
A vision of "a new heaven and a new earth."

Epilogue (22:6–21)

Jesus is coming back: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

TERMS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

666—Number of the beast, spelled out in Rev. 13:18 as six hundred sixty-six. Greek and Hebrew did not have written numbers. Instead, either they spelled out the number, or they wrote out the number using the letters in the alphabet. For example, the first letter of the alphabet might represent the number one, and so on. Many scholars point out that, in Hebrew, the number of Nero's name can be 666 if written using *Neron*, the Latin spelling of the name. (Nero reigned AD 54–68. He was the first emperor to engage in specific persecution of Christians.) A good approach to this issue is to remember that six is a symbol of incompleteness; 666 indicated total imperfection.

144,000—Group of believers who endure the great tribulation (Rev. 7:14). Some believe that these persons are literally 144,000 Jews—12,000 from each tribe—who embrace Jesus Christ as their Lord (see Rev. 7:4–9). Others suggest that the terms "Israel" and "twelve tribes" often refer to Christians (Romans 9:6–8; Galatians 6:16; James 1:1). Therefore, the number would point to God's people (symbolized by twelve tribes, twelve apostles, or both) multiplied by 1,000 (a number that symbolizes an extreme multitude or length of time)—in other words, the full number of those who belong to God.

Abomination of desolation—An event that desecrates the temple in Jerusalem and is a signal to Jesus' followers that soon Jerusalem will be ruined. Mentioned in Matthew 24:15, it may refer to the destruction of the temple in AD 70 by the Romans, or Roman plans to set up a statue of the Emperor in the temple in AD 40, or some future event.

Antichrist—(from Greek, *antichristos*, in place of Christ) Anyone who denies what the apostles taught about Jesus Christ (1 John 2:18–22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7). Specifically, the antichrist is a Satanic counterfeit of Jesus Christ, described as "lawless" and as a "beast" (2 Thessalonians 2:3–8; Revelation 13:1–18; 17:3–17). The antichrist could be a specific person who rises to power during a time of tribulation or a symbol of false teachers and leaders who will arise when the end of the age draws near.

Armageddon—(from Hebrew, *Har-Megiddon*, Mount Megiddo) The city of Megiddo was located between the Plain of Jezreel and Israel's western

coast. Deborah, Gideon, Saul, Ahaziah, and Josiah fought decisive battles near Megiddo—largely because the area around Megiddo is broad and flat. So the valley of Megiddo became the symbol of a point of decisive conflict. Some believe that a literal battle will occur near Megiddo near the end of time. Others view the reference to Armageddon as a symbol of an ultimate conflict between spiritual forces of good and evil.

Babylon—Revelation 17 presents the figure of a prostitute called Babylon riding upon a scarlet beast. The name is symbolic, yet interpretations vary:

1. Jerusalem: Jewish people assisted the Romans in their persecution of Christians after AD 64. The fall of Babylon could be a symbolic reference to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.
2. Rome: After AD 70, Jewish writers often referred to Rome as "Babylon."¹ The name may symbolize the political and religious powers in every age that attempt to defy God and to persecute His people.
3. One-world government and religion: Babylon may be a reference to a one-world government and one-world religion that will emerge near the end of time.

Beasts, two—Symbolic creatures described in Revelation 11:7 and 13:1–18.

The first beast: This creature rises from the sea and has ten horns and seven heads. The seven heads seem to point to Rome, the city known for its seven hills. Some interpreters understand this reference to Rome as a literal reference to a power that will arise from Rome near the end of time; others view it as a symbolic reference to the powers in every age that defy God's dominion and persecute God's people. The beast claims blasphemous names for itself—much like Domitian, emperor from AD 81 until 96, who demanded that he be addressed as "Lord and God." One of the horns seemed to have died but then returned to life—much like the false rumor that emerged after the death of Nero that he had come back to life.²

The second beast: This creature rises from the earth with horns like a lamb and a voice like a dragon—in other words, a satanic parody of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. Some interpreters understand this creature as a literal leader who will encourage people to worship the

first beast. Others view the second beast as a symbol of any religion in any time period that focuses worshipers on anything other than Jesus Christ.

Final judgment—The event described in Rev. 20:11-15, when God resurrects all people, judges them from the great white throne, and delivers them to their eternal destinies.

Letters to the Seven Churches—After the opening vision (Chapter 1), John begins to write to the messengers (angels) of seven churches, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The messages review the churches' histories, give warnings and commands, and tells them to prepare for what is about to unfold. Scholars agree that these were actual messages to real churches in existence in John's day, though some see in the seven churches patterns that apply to the church in specific past, present, or future eras.

Mark of the beast—Indication of a person's allegiance to the teachings of the antichrist (Revelation 13:16-17). The people of God receive a similar mark, indicating their loyalty to Jesus (Revelation 7:3; 9:4; 14:1; 22:4). Some biblical students believe that the mark of the beast will be an actual mark, required by the antichrist. (Between the Old and New Testaments, some Jews were forced to be branded with the symbol of the god Dionysius.³) Other interpreters of Revelation understand the mark as a reference to someone's actions ("hand") and beliefs ("forehead"). "Hand" and "forehead" seem to carry this symbolic meaning in Exodus 13:9, 16.

Views of the Millennium—Chapter 20, the only direct reference in the Bible to a reign of Christ that lasts 1,000 years, is one of the most controversial sections of the Bible.

There are three basic views—Premillennialism, Amillennialism and Postmillennialism—that help to categorize the different interpretations.

- **Premillennialism** holds that Christ will return before the millennium. Jesus will rule the world and begin an age of peace and security. There are two varieties within this view: Historic Premillennialism and Dispensational Premillennialism.

- *Historic Premillennialism* sees Christ's return at the end of the great tribulation. This time of tribulation may last seven years, or "seven" may symbolically refer to the completeness of this tribulation. The church will go through this time of trouble but endure to greet Christ when he comes.

- *Dispensational Premillennialism* holds that the church will not endure the great tribulation. Christ will remove the church before that time or, alternatively, at some point before the worst experiences of the tribulation.

- **Amillennialism** is the view that the millennium is not a literal one thousand years. It refers to the period now in progress in which the gospel is spreading throughout the world and Christ is ruling at the right hand of God the Father.

- **Postmillennialism** asserts that there will be a period of great peace and security when the gospel has spread throughout the world and Christ reigns spiritually, through His people. After this time of one thousand years or so, Christ will return to end history.

Witnesses, two—Two beings described in Rev. 11:1-14 who speak the truth about God before being killed and then resurrected. (1) Some believe that these two witnesses are two people who will appear during the tribulation, near the end of time. (2) Others view them as two biblical prophets—perhaps Moses and Elijah—that have been resurrected to proclaim God's truth during the tribulation. (3) Others see the two witnesses as symbols of the Law and the Prophets—both of these testified about Jesus and yet, this testimony was rejected, even to the point of killing those that appealed to this testimony (for example, Stephen in Acts 7). If so, the "resurrection" of the two witnesses would point to a time of final vindication, a point at which God demonstrates that the Law and Prophets did indeed testify about Jesus Christ.

¹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 19.

² G. E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 178-179.

³ 3 Maccabees 2:29.