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## **REVELATION**

**Or,**

**“What on earth do I do with this book of the Bible?”**

**January 17, 2019**  
**Pastor Brian Durand**

Sources:

*Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness, Following the Lamb into the New Creation*, Michael J. Gorman (Cascade Books, Eugene, Oregon, 2011).

*Revelation for Everyone*, NT Wright (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 2011).

*Becoming Disciples Through Bible Study, Second Edition*, Richard B. Wilke and Julia K. Wilke (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1993)

*Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation*, Bruce Metzger (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1993)

The first word of the book of Revelation is “Apokalypsis”, which means to make known, to reveal, “Revelation, or making that which is secret or hidden known.

The first three words in the book of Revelation are “Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ” which translates to making Jesus Christ known or the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

A revealing of Jesus, the Messiah. God gave it to make plain to his servants what is about to happen. He published and delivered it by Angel to his servant John. And John told everything he saw: God’s Word— the witness of Jesus Christ!

– Revelation 1:1-3 in *The Message* by Eugene Peterson

Pastor Brian’s four beliefs about Revelation:

1. Revelation is about Jesus.
2. Revelation is about what and how and why we worship.
3. Revelation is about following Jesus, or discipleship.
4. Revelation is about hope.

Revelation reveals the reality of the undefeatable love of Jesus for his followers.

Biblical scholar and theologian N.T. Wright on reading Revelation as a teenager from beginning to end after school one day:

“The funny thing is I am quite sure I didn’t understand what on earth it was all about, but I can still remember the explosive power and beauty of it, the sense that the New Testament I held in my hands had a thunderstorm hidden inside of it that nobody had warned me about.” – excerpt from *Following Jesus*, p. 54

What is your most pressing question about the book of Revelation?

What do you find most confusing or most scary about Revelation?

What are you hoping to learn or gain from this time of study?

## WHO SAID IT?

*Try and guess who said the following about the book of Revelation...*

“a book of riddles that requires a Revelation to explain it...”

Thomas Paine, Founding Father and pamphlet writer who lived from 1737-1809

“curious record of the vision of a drug addict...”

George Bernard Shaw, Famous playwright who lived from 1856-1950

“the most rabid outburst of vindictiveness in all recorded history”

Frederick Nietchze, Famous German philosopher who lived from 1844-1900.

“neither apostolic nor prophetic...I can in no way detect that the Holy Spirit produced it...Again, they are supposed to be blessed who keep what is written in this book, and yet no one knows what that is, to say nothing of keeping it...Christ is neither taught nor known in it.”

Martin Luther, Priest and Biblical scholar of the Reformation, writing in 1522

If you find Revelation strange and bizarre, or confusing, or frustrating, you're not alone.

## NAME THAT TUNE

### Holy, Holy, Holy

Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;  
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,  
Which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.  
(Revelation 4 and 1:4,8)

### Crown Him With Many Crowns

The Lamb upon His throne.  
Hark! How the heavenly anthem drowns all music but its own.  
Awake, my soul, and sing of Him who died for thee,  
And hail Him as thy matchless King through all eternity.  
(Revelation 5, 7:17, 19:12, 22:1)

### Handel's Messiah

Hallelujah! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth  
The kingdom of this world is become  
The kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ;  
And he shall reign for ever and ever  
King of kings, and Lord of Lords. Hallelujah!  
(Revelation 11:15, 17:14, 19:6,16)

### All Who Are Thirsty

All who are weak  
Come to the fountain  
Dip your heart in the stream of life  
Let the pain and the sorrow  
Be washed away...  
Come, Lord Jesus, come  
(Revelation 22)

Revelation speaks to our deepest fears and deepest longings at the same time.

# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

## Two Worldviews

### 1. Ancient Worldview

Earth is a square with 4 corners and set on pillars

Below the earth is Sheol (or Hades) the place of the dead

Water is under the earth which produces springs, and there is fire in the earth which leak out rivers of fire (volcanoes)

Above earth is a glass dome separates the waters from the air

God is above earth

### 2. Ptolemaic Universe

Earth is sphere at the center of the universe surrounded by 8 spheres of glass

High God (Zeus) is beyond the spheres

Closer to earth gods get lower

God, local gods, demigods, immortals, demons

A mediator guides one into the heavens – Isis, Jesus

Implications:

1. Reading Revelation with a 2019 knowledge of astronomy and the universe is very different that what John or his hearer would know.
2. The levels of heaven, Hades, the four corners of earth – all of these will appear in Revelation and we'll better understand if we know where they came from.

## Christians in the Roman Empire

AD 64 Nero, after blaming Christians for the fire in Rome, lit the city at night by burning Christians on tar-soaked stands.

AD 70 Vespasian, Nero's successor, sent his son Titus to destroy Jerusalem in an effort to put down the Jews.

AD 81 Domitian became Roman emperor, or Caesar, and immediately declared himself a God to be worshipped.

Implications:

1. As the Christian movement grew and Jesus didn't return right away, questions emerged. What is God doing now? What were His plans for all the churches.
2. As the Christian movement was persecuted, other questions arose. Why was God allowing followers of Jesus to suffer persecution? What should they do in light of the growing influence of Caesar and the demand to worship him as a god? Should they resist?

## The New Testament

140 AD The first canon (selected books of the Bible) was created by Marcion and was almost entirely made up of the letters of Paul.

In the second century, the church continued to diversify and efforts began to choose which books would be included in the New Testament.

Criteria included: the most ancient texts, written by the apostles, and contain correct teaching (consistent across accounts).

In the early third century, Cyril of Jerusalem omitted Revelation from his list. Eusebius listed Revelation as a “disputed” book.

363 AD Council of Laodicea listed 26 of the 27 books in our current New Testament

367 AD Athanasius created a canonical list that included the 27 books of the New Testament of today.

393 AD The list of Athanasius was affirmed at the Council of Hippo.

397 AD The same list was again affirmed at the Council of Carthage.

Implications:

1. Each book of the Bible belongs to a specific historical setting and speaks to a unique issue or time.
2. The Bible as a whole comes to us via a community of voices and discernment.
3. Revelation held an important place in the early church and was included with a reason.

What is one thing you’ve learned or one “aha” moment of revelation that you’ve had so far that you’d like to hang onto or share with someone?

# FORM AND FUNCTION

## Apocalyptic Literature

What comes to mind when you hear the term “apocalyptic literature”?

Characteristics of Apocalyptic Writing:

1. Reflects a cosmic struggle waged between the forces of good (God and angels) and evil (Satan, demons).
2. Emphasizes end times – can mean the end of an age or the end of time as we know it.
3. Includes temporal dualism – two ages contained in the message, the current age and the age to come. The current age is under the influence of evil and includes suffering and injustice. The suffering will increase until the age to come. The age to come will bring about God’s justice, peace, and joy.
4. Reflects both pessimism (nothing can be done and there is not human solution to the struggle) and optimism (the coming triumph of God).
5. Contains images and symbols that when written were meant to be obscure and hidden from the powers of the time.
6. Often the revelation is to be hidden or kept secret (not true of Revelation)

“Scholars debate the origins of apocalyptic theology and literature, but its basic function seems fairly clear: to sustain the people of God, especially in times of crisis, particularly evil and oppression.”

– Michael Gorman,  
*Reading Revelation Responsibly*,  
Location 483

## Prophecy

What comes to mind when you hear the word prophecy?

Characteristics of Biblical Prophecy:

1. Speaking God’s word to the people.
2. Often warns the people of consequences or judgment
3. Usually conveys God’s covenant promise.

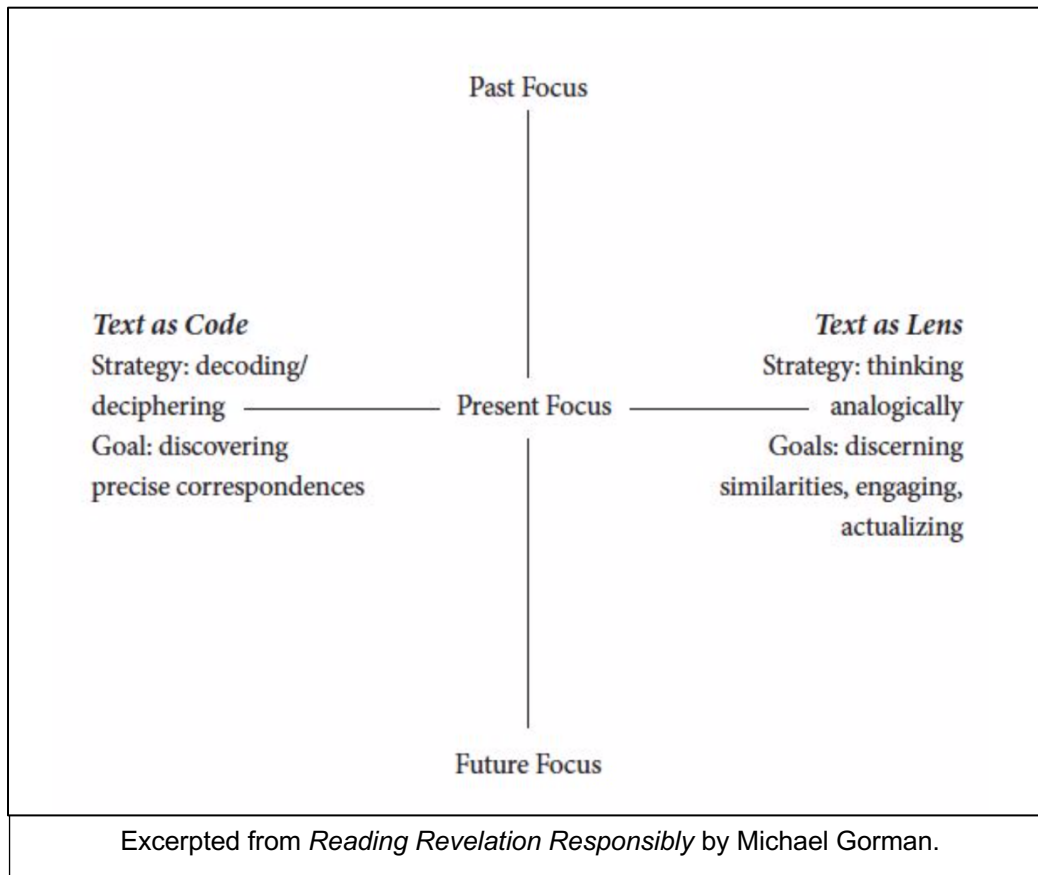
## Liturgical Letter

If Jesus gave a vision and instructions in a vision to a messenger for Clay Church today, what do you think would be in the letter?

Characteristics of Biblical Letters:

1. Written to shape Christian communities.
2. Often contains creeds, doxologies, or prayers.
3. Often circulated along a missionary route and/or among house churches in a particular community.

## WAYS TO INTERPRET REVELATION



1. Predictive approach - Focuses on the future, effort to predict history. Dates back to Justin Martyr and Irenaeus in the second century.

Two types.

- a. Historicist approach - Revelation as prediction of the age of Christ, culminating in the time of the interpreter.
  - b. Futurist approach - Focused on eschatology, Revelation as focused on "end times"
2. Preterist approach - Focuses on past, Revelation as strictly a document about and for its own time. Meaning of symbols is confined to the first century.

3. Poetic (or Idealist) approach - Uses mythical and poetic language to express truths about God, evil, history.
4. Political approach - Book of comfort and protest, criticizing injustice and promoting the voices of those suffering. MLK, South Africa
5. Pastoral-Prophetic approach - Focused on calling the church to faithful witness in the presence of suffering and conflict with power and culture.

Which approach resonates for you? Why?

## INFLUENCES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Almost 70 percent of the verses of Revelation contain Old Testament references.

### Daniel

Read Daniel 7:9-14 and 10:1-12  
Read Revelation 1:7-20

Make a list of all the parallels you find in these passages:

*“I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was **someone like a son of man**, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a **golden sash** around his chest. The hair on his head was **white like wool**, as white as snow, and his **eyes were like blazing fire**. His **feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace**, and his **voice was like the sound of rushing waters**.” (Rev. 1:7, 12–15 [emphasis added])*

### Book of Life

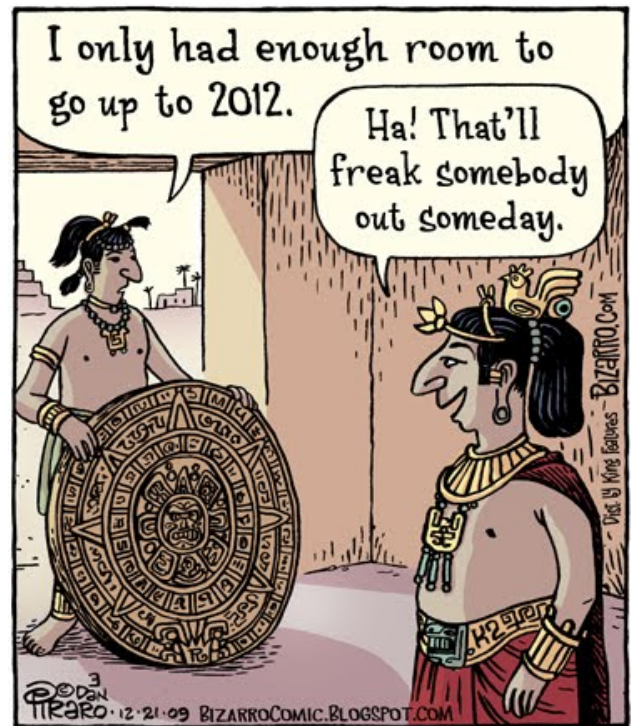
Read Exodus 32:30-34  
Read Psalm 69:26-28  
Revelation 3:5

John is not advancing a theory about predestination.

He is presenting a long-known warning against presuming that belonging to the people of God is all that is required.

## SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

Apocalyptic literature is imaginative writing that uses signs and symbols to point to concepts and ideas that are beyond words and, in times of persecution and injustice, to speak of the ruling power in code and symbols that won't be easily deciphered.



## Numbers

1	God, a holy number	
3	Heaven or the Trinity, divinity or false divinity	1:4-5
4	Earth, the 4 corners, 4 winds, universality	4:6-8, 5:6
6	Humanity, imperfection, lack of fullness	
7	Perfect, complete, holy, divine, combination of 3 (heaven) and 4 (earth)	3:1, 1:4, 11:12, 17:9
12	Tribes of Israel, disciples, apostles,	12:1, 22:2
13	Unlucky as sum of 6 and 7	
24	12 sons of Jacob plus 12 apostles, the full covenant	4:4, 11:16
144,000	12,000 x 12, a complete number, the perfected people of God	7:4-8
666	Evil, sign of the beast, humans trying to take the place of God	13:18
1/3 or 1/2	Limited scope or time	8:1, 9:15
1000	Large number, masses	5:11, 20:2-7
3 ½	Limited time, ½ of fullness, 42 months, 1260 days	11:2-3, 11:9, 11, 13:5

## Colors

White	Victory, resurrection, purity, heaven, divinity
Red	Blood, violent power
Purple, Scarlet	Decadence, empire and imperial evil
Black	Disaster, death
Pale green	Death
Gold	Incorruptible wealth, beauty, royalty, actual or false divinity

## Symbols

4 Horsemen	White horse – conquest Bright red horse – breakdown of peace Black horse – death in war Pale green horse – economic injustice, famine, and disease	6:1-8
The woman	Israel	12
The dragon	Satan	12
The child	Jesus	12
Sodom	Jerusalem	11:8
The great whore	The unfaithful nation, Rome	17:1
The scarlet beast	Persecuting empire, the Roman empire	17:3
Blasphemous names	Titles give to Roman emperors, exalting others before God	13:1, 17:3
Harmagedon (Armageddon)	Hill of Meggido in Palestine where many battles had been though for thousands of years, symbolically the place of final victory	16:16
Babylon	Rome, any empire of oppression	18:2
The Lamb	Jesus	5:6
The beast	Antichrist, the great beast like a leopard, bear, lion and lion rolls the evil empires of Daniel into one – The Roman empire?	13:1-15

## THE CHRONOLOGY OF REVELATION

The events in the vision of Revelation are told in progression but are not linear in their sense of time.

Read Revelation 6:12-17

Read Revelation 7:3

Read Revelation 11:15-19

Both the sixth and seventh seals progress the vision to the end of the age.

Instead of searching for a chronological map of future events, try to discover the theological message in each section of the vision.

A better image of revelation than a line is a spiral, where variations on a main theme are building to a big finish!

## INTERLOCKING STORIES

In *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, Michael Gorman presents five interwoven narratives of particular importance in Revelation:

1. “Creation and Re-Creation – The story of the faithful, missional, Creator God bringing humanity and all of creation to its proper end: reconciliation, harmony, and eternal joy in the presence of God.
2. Redemption – The story of the faithful missional, redeemer Lamb living, dying, reigning and coming again to carry out the Creator God’s mission and create a faithful, missional people.
3. Judgment – the faithful, missional God and the Lamb bringing an end to evil as a necessary means for the purpose of recreation and final redemption.
4. Witness – the suffering, pilgrim church of faithful, missional people on earth who have been redeemed by the Lamb and empowered by the Spirit to worship and bear witness to God and the Lamb in spite of danger and persecution.
5. Victory – the church triumphant, the story of the faithful, missional people who worship God and the Lamb now and forever in their presence, the appropriate reward for their faithfulness even to death.”

Excerpted from *Reading Revelation Responsibly* by Michael Gorman.

What have you learned in this study that you want to remember or share?

What questions do you still have?

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Thanks to Topher

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HERE'S THE WAY REVELATION WILL WORK  
JOHN ... I'LL WIPE OUT THE BAD GUYS  
AND SAVE ALL THE GOOD GUYS, SIMPLE,  
EH? ... JOHN?

Read Revelation 21 and 22

Revelation in 7 words: "The worst thing is not the last thing."

Revelation in 5 words: "In the end, God wins."

What do you hope in the eternal life Jesus promises you?

"Where do you find hope in your faith? Wars and rumors of war continue. Prejudice, crime, disease, and drugs pervade the planet. Weeping and pain and death are constant. Justice eludes us. Where is the victory? Where is hope?" (Richard and Julie Wilke, *Disciple Bible Study*, p. 236)

How do you answer these questions for yourself today? How would you answer them if asked by someone else?

## OTHER NOTES

Seven blessings appear in the Book of Revelation:

1. Revelation 1:3
2. Revelation 14:13
3. Revelation 16:15
4. Revelation 19:9
5. Revelation 20:6
6. Revelation 22:7
7. Revelation 22:14