

How To Study Revelation

Week 4: The Throne and The Lamb pt. 1

Rapture Theology

- The word Rapture does not appear in the Bible.
 - It comes from a Latin Vulgate translation of the word ἁρπαζω (*harpazo*) In 1 Thes 4:17.
 - ἁρπαζω - which means to steal, carry off, snatch away, or drag away. (John 6:15, Mat 12:29, John 10:9)
- The word ἁρπαζω does not appear in Revelation, nor does any direct reference to the rapture, yet Revelation is most often associated with the Rapture. (Why?)
- Dispensationalists view the rapture as the next significant prophetic event to be fulfilled.
 - The theological approach is Futurist, pre-millennial, and pre-tribulation.
 - This view believes the events in Revelation predict the near future, and the rapture will occur before a literal 7-year tribulation that precedes the final battle, and the millennial reign of Christ.
 - The theological view believes that Jesus will partially return to snatch the church out of the world.
 - Supporters of this view often reference Rev 4:1-2 and the absence of direct references to the Church in Rev 4 – 21.
- The historic (pre-dispensationalist) view provides contrast. For most of Church history, the belief was that there is one return of Christ at the end of the tribulation, whether the tribulation is a literal or allegorical seven years.
 - This view included Futurists (before the 19th century), preterist believers, theopoetic, theopolitical, and pastoral prophetic.
 - This view rejects a two-stage return of Christ and understands 1 Thes 4:13-18 to reference the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of the Saints.
 - The view understands the resurrection of the Saints to occur at the same time as the visible (and only) return of Christ (Mat. 24:27; 1 Cor 15:23; James 5:8; 1Jn 2:28).

- Additional Reading
 - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-rapture-question/>¹

Symbolism

- Allegory vs. Literal interpretations
 - Different understandings of the symbols used in revelation present the most significant division between interpretive and theological approaches to Revelation.
 - While most acknowledge the presence of symbols, the question of which texts should be translated as allegorical, symbolic, or literal is often contested.
 - Allegorical
 - Idealist, Historic, and Pastoral Prophetic interpretive approaches search for symbolism that references knowledge of scripture, historic culture, and timeless truth.
 - Examples: The sword from Jesus's mouth is not an actual sword but a reference to the word of God; the 1000-year reign may not be a literal 1000 years but symbolizes a large (long) amount of time.
 - "Animals, colors, numbers, and other everyday entities take on symbolic value as apocalyptic seers attempt to express the nearly inexpressible. Certain colors and numbers are among the most frequent and important aspects of the symbolism in Revelation. The colors function more like images than adjectives, and the numbers more like adjectives than numbers."²
 - Literal
 - Futurists and some Preterists often search for literal interpretation when possible. When symbolism is present, it is a code to be broken.

¹ NOTE: The article's conclusion emphasizes a specific approach that can be critical of dispensationalism. While it is impossible to fully eliminate bias in such an article the bias should also be noted before reading.

² Gorman, Michael J.. Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation (p. 33). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers

- Examples: A literal 7-year time period for the tribulation, a literal battle at the end of the tribulation on the field of Megiddo.
 - The struggle with this approach is determining when there is a symbol to decode or when something is not a symbol.
- See Appendix 1 for a symbolism chart.

The Throne and the Throne Room (Rev 4)

(Chapters 4 and 5 go together; they are two panels of the same painting and should be understood in unison and connected. The central figures are the Throne and the Lamb)

- God is the central figure of the Throne Room.
 - The throne being central to the chapter shows God's sovereignty and power (this is important in contrast to The Lamb).
- Depictions of Throne Room
 - Rev 4 depicts a blend of temple and throne-room scenes from the Ancient Near East, as reflected in Isaiah 6 and Daniel 7, Ezekiel 1, and from the Roman Empire, where the emperor was honored and worshiped as sovereign of the universe.
 - The Throne
 - The voice of God is depicted coming from the Throne in descriptive terms that can be found in
 - Descriptions:
 - God is depicted on a throne (1 Kings 22:19; Isa 6:1; Ezek 1:26),
 - God having a white appearance (Dan 7:9),
 - God is surrounded by beauty (Ezek 1:18, 26–28)
 - The presence of a sea (Ezek 1:22; Dan 7:2–3)
 - Fire/smoke/lightning (Exod 3:2–3; 19:16, 18; Isa 6:4; Ezek 1:4, 13–14; Dan 7:9–10),
 - Angels (1 Kings 22:19; Exod 3:2; Dan 7:10),

- Various other living creatures (Ezek 1:5–25; 10:15–22; Dan 7:3–7).
 - The Creatures
 - The four creatures resemble a man, lion, ox, and eagle (Ezek 1:10, Isa 6:2).
 - The creatures lead all living things in worship of God.
 - Beginning in the 2nd Century AD, Christians began associating the four creatures with the four Gospels (READ BOOK).
 - Others interpret the creatures to represent creation in proper unity with God.
 - The Elders
 - The 24 elders
 - Seated on thrones around the one throne
 - Dressed in white
 - Each has a golden crown
 - Who are the 24 Elders
 - Twenty-four elders as the people of God; the number is taken either from the 24 priestly orders instituted by David (1 Chron 24:1–19) or from the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles.
 - The word elder came from the Greek word presbyteros and was often used for Jewish or Christian leaders (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5, James 5:14, 1 Pet 5:1-2; 3 John 1).
 - The Messages to the Churches
 - Sardis was told that those who conquer would be clothed in white (Rev 3:5)
 - Smyrna was told to be faithful unto death to receive the crown of life (Rev 2:10)
 - Laodicea was told that all who conquered would be granted to sit with Jesus on the Father's throne (Rev 3:21).
 - The
 - In the proper order of creation, everything is oriented towards God.
 - Interpretive Understandings

- Preterists and Historic (theopolitical)
 - There are several similarities to the rituals associated with the Roman imperial court.
 - The presence of attendants around the imperial throne
 - The offering of hymns and acclamations to the emperor
 - The practice of attendants and lesser kings giving golden crowns to him.
 - Public appearances of the empowered in the first century often depicted the emperor sitting on a throne surrounded by friends, advisors, generals, and attendants.
 - When the emperor would travel, communities would send representatives, often dressed in white, to greet him and present him with golden crowns to show their recognition of his sovereignty.
 - Preterists will acknowledge the symbolism for what it meant to compare God to Ceasar.
 - Historicists or Theopolitical will see this as God being more significant than any man-instituted ruler or king.
- Futurists
 - Futurists may draw a comparison to a singular Anti-Christ or opposition to the Throne of Satan (Rev 2:13; 13:2; 16:10)
 - Dispensationalists often focus on vs. 4:1-2 as a reference to the rapture.
- Centering Focus
 - “Worship is meeting at the center so that our lives are centered in God and not lived eccentrically. We worship so that we live in response to and from this center, the living God. Failure to worship consigns us to a life of spasms and jerks, at the mercy of every advertisement, every seduction, every siren If there is no center, there is no circumference. People who do not worship are swept into a vast restlessness, epidemic in the world, with no steady direction and no sustained purpose.” – Eugene Peterson.

Appendix 1: Symbolism of Color and Numbers

<i>Color/Number</i>	<i>Apparent Symbolic Significance</i>	<i>Text Examples</i>
White	Victory, resurrection, purity/cleanness, heaven/ divinity	Son of Man's hair (1:14); clothing of the faithful, martyrs, elders (3:4-5, 18; 6:11; 7:9, 13-14; 19:14); horse of judgment (6:2); horses of Christ and his armies (19:11, 14); throne of God (20:11)
Red	Blood, violent power	horse of judgment (6:4); riders' breastplates (9:17); dragon (12:3)
Purple, scarlet (similar to red)	Decadence, empire and imperial evil	beast (scarlet; 17:3); clothing of great harlot/city = Babylon (purple, scarlet; 17:3-4; 18: 16); merchants' cargo traded to great harlot/Babylon (purple, scarlet; 18:12)
Black	Death, disaster	horse of judgment (6:5); sun (6:12)
(Pale) Green	Death	horse of judgment (6:8)
Gold	Incorruptible wealth, beauty, royalty; actual or false divinity	lampstands (1: 12, 20; 2: 1); sash of Son of Man and of angels (1:13; 15:6); what Christ offers the church (p8); elders' crowns (4:4); bowls of incense & censer = prayers (5:8; 8:3); bowls of wrath

		(15:7); locusts' crowns (9:7); heavenly altar (9:13); idols (9:20); Son of Man's crown (14:14); jewels and cup of great harlot/city (17=4; 18:16); measuring rod for New Jerusalem (21:15); New Jerusalem and its streets (21:18, 21)
1/3, 1/2	Limited scope or time	silence (8:1); destruction (8:7-12; 9:15, 18; 12:4)
3	A distinct group Divinity or false divinity	angels (8:13), plagues (9:18), parts of the city (16:19) the one who was, is, is to come (1:4); triune source of grace (1:4-5) dragon+ two beasts (chaps. 12-13); foul spirits emanating from them (16:13)
3 1/2	Limited time (half of fullness = 7)	3 1/2 years = 42 months = 1,260 days, the time for: the trampling of the holy city and the two witnesses' prophesying (11:2-3); days between witnesses' death and resurrection (u:9, u); years of woman's nourishment in wilderness

		(12:6, 14) and of the beast's blasphemy (13:5)
4	Universality, especially within creation	living creatures in heaven (4:6-8; 5:6, 8, 14; 6:1, 6-7; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19=4); horses (6:1-8); angels, corners of earth, and winds (7:1-2; 9:15; 20:8)
6	Imperfection, false divinity	number of beast= 666 (13:18) (lack of fullness= 7)
7	Fullness, perfection	spirits of God (3:1; 4:5; 5:6); stars in Son of Man's hand = churches' angels (1:16; 2:1; 3:1); churches/lan1pstands (1:4, 11- 12, 20; 2:1); seals, angels and trumpets, and bowls of judgment (5:1, 5; 6:1; 8:2, 6; 15:1, 6-8; 16:1; 17:1; 21:9); Lamb's horns and eyes (5:6); thunders (10:3- 4); dragon's heads and diaden1s (12:3); beast's heads (13:1; 17:3, 7); heads= n1ountains, kings (17:9)
12 (and its multiples 24, 144)	(fullness of) God's people, God's chosen tribes and/ or apostles, God's presence; cosmic fullness	12: ,woman's crowns of stars (12:1); gates of pearl, angels, inscriptions of tribes, foundations, and names of apostles in

		<p>new Jerusalem (21:12, 14, 21); kinds of fruit on tree of life (22:2)</p> <p>24: heavenly thrones and elders (4 , 10; 5:8; 11:16; 19:4)</p> <p>144: 144,000 who are sealed (7:14) and the faithful with the Lamb (14:1, 3)</p>
1,000 and its multiples	Large number with enhanced symbolism in multiples	<p>thousands of heavenly angels (5:11); the 144,000 who are sealed (7:4), with 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes (7:5- 8); 7,000 killed in earthquake (11:13); 144,000 faithful, with the Lamb (14:1, 3); dragon bound for 1,000 years while Christ reigns, with the faithful (20:2-7)</p>

Gorman, Michael J.. Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation (p. 46). Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers.