

Lesson 35: Revelation Review #2

We're closing our Revelation seminar by briefly revisiting the 4 "table-setting" lessons that introduced this course. Prior to reading and discussing seals, trumpets, bowls, dragons, beasts, and the Bride-City, we asked:

- What is eschatology?
- Why does it matter?
- How should we read Revelation at all?
- What timeline does the Bible itself give us?
- What is the book trying to do to us as we read it?

Those questions weren't an academic preface; they were the keys to reading. Without them, symbolic visions become a puzzle hunt. With them, the same visions become pastoral, worship-shaping, and courage-producing.

Today's recap is not a re-argument of everything, but a re-centering. We'll rehearse the core convictions that guided our approach: an irenica, confessional, covenant-theology posture; an optimistic amillennial expectation; an eclectic idealist reading strategy that embraces recapitulation; and the Bible's 2-age timeline. We'll also remember why the book opens with: *"Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it"* (**Revelation 1:3**): it was given to strengthen ordinary saints to persevere with joy in This Age as we await The Age to Come. Remember the key theme of this book as I have stated it:

"How can we live as faithful Israel in the midst of a fallen-Babylon world?"



Eschatology & Why Labels Help (Lesson 1 Recap)

What "eschatology" is and why Christians should care

"Eschatology" simply means Scripture's teaching on last things: Christ's return, the general resurrection, final judgment, and the new creation. But biblically, "last things" aren't just the end of the story; they are the goal of the story. God always intended to dwell with His people forever. If we shrug and say, "It'll all pan-out" (the so-called "pan-millennial" position), we risk treating the goal of history as optional. They also aren't only for the "end times", as the New Testament clearly identifies Christ's ministry ushering in the "last days". Studying eschatology isn't a hobby for the speculative; it's an act of discipleship. It stabilizes hope, clarifies mission, and corrects expectations for the present.

Why use labels not found in a concordance?

We use words like "Trinity", "incarnation", "typology", and "hypostatic union" because they help us say in a few syllables what Scripture teaches across many verses, chapters, and books. Eschatological labels such as amillennial, premillennial (historic or dispensational), and postmillennial, function the same way. They are not inspired; they are tools. Used humbly, they speed understanding, locate meaningful differences, and connect us to the church's historic reflection. Used arrogantly, they turn into "team jerseys". Our aim is the former: clarity with charity (neither mean nor mushy).

Four orthodox frameworks (and why we took one)

- **Historic/Covenantal Premillennialism:** Christ returns before a millennial reign; strong continuity between covenants; often sees the church as the true Israel.
- **Dispensational Premillennialism:** sharp Israel-church distinction; often a pre-tribulation rapture; a literal earthly 1,000-year reign focused on national Israel.
- **Postmillennialism:** anticipates a long period of widespread gospel prosperity before Christ returns; not necessarily universal conversion but marked cultural transformation.
- **Amillennialism (our stance):** *"the millennium" describes This Age, the time between Christ's first advent and His return, where the risen Christ reigns and believers share spiritually in that reign; ordinary tribulation persists, with a short final intensification; then one return of Christ, one general resurrection/judgment, and the eternal state.*

I have taught from an *optimistic amillennial* posture: confident in Christ's present reign, sober about ordinary tribulation, hopeful about the gospel's advance, and anchored in the certainty of the new creation. This was not to caricature other views, but to present a coherent frame that best fits the canonical storyline and Revelation's own structure.

How to Read Revelation (Lesson 2 Recap)

Four interpretive perspectives

- **Preterism:** emphasizes that much in the book made immediate sense in the 1st century, especially under Roman pressure. Partial preterism remains orthodox by keeping the visible return and resurrection; full preterism denies these and is heretical.
 - **Key Question:** "When did it happen?"
- **Historicism:** reads Revelation as a panorama of church history. It captures the book's ongoing relevance but easily slides into speculative date-matching.
 - **Key Question:** "What chapter are we in?"
- **Futurism:** sees most of chapters 4–22 as still future. Highlights hope in Christ's appearing, but minimizes the book's meaning to the original audiences.
 - **Key Question:** "How close are we to chapter 4?"
- **Idealism:** focuses on the book's symbols as depictions of perennial realities in This Age: the Lamb's victory, the church's faithful witness, beastly opposition, Babylon's seduction, and God's ultimate judgment.
 - **Key Question:** "How do we live as faithful Israel in a fallen-Babylon world?"

Our Reading Strategy: Eclectic idealism

We embraced an *eclectic idealism*: we gladly receive *preterism's* sensitivity to the 1st-century context; we preserve *futurism's* certainty of consummation; we borrow *historicism's* instinct that the book speaks across the centuries; and we retain *idealism's* conviction that Revelation communicates reality through symbol and vision, not newspaper chronology. This approach matches how the book reads itself: overlapping cycles that retell the same era (*This Age*) from different vantage points and repeatedly telescope to the end. That is why you felt the "diorama" effect all along: the camera keeps circling the same battlefield with new angles, then flashes the horizon of *The Age to Come*.

Symbols convey more, not less

Calling something "symbolic" does not make it less real; it makes it more intelligible. A sword from Christ's mouth signals the power of His word better than a paragraph could. A harlot named Babylon captures the intoxicating blend of idolatry + luxury + power better than a bullet list. The point of symbol is not to obscure but to reveal, to turn the kaleidoscope of Scripture so we see the same truth refracted in awe-inducing ways. Think of the multi-faceted jewel that we observe and admire from many different angles and perspectives. A new symbol might tell us more about the jewel, showing a different angle, but it doesn't change the core reality of the jewel. It's the same jewel each time.

The Bible's Timeline (Lesson 3 Recap)

Hermeneutical commitments

We adopted simple but crucial reading rules:

- **Clear before difficult:** let the plain shape the puzzling
- **Literal before figurative:** read according to genre, then let symbols signal themselves
- **General before detailed:** big biblical themes set boundaries
- **Scripture interprets Scripture:** later texts illuminate earlier ones and vice versa

Two ages. No gap.

The New Testament repeatedly contrasts This Age with The Age to Come. This Age is marked by persecution, mixture, and mission; The Age to Come is resurrection, glory, and God's unveiled presence. Scripture never inserts a third, earthly "golden age" between them. Instead, This Age yields directly to The Age to Come at Christ's return. That is why the church's basic experience now is "*tribulation and kingdom and patient endurance in Jesus*" (**Revelation 1:9**). We taste the powers of the Age to Come through the Spirit, worship, and holiness, but we still live amid opposition.

Expect ordinary tribulation and extraordinary grace.

How that timeline trains us

- **It curbs speculation:** We are not tasked with decoding when the seals start or the trumpets end; we are tasked with enduring, witnessing, and worshiping until Jesus returns.
- **It guards against triumphalism:** The mission may flourish; the church may experience real renewal and expansion; but we don't expect a global utopia prior to the Lord's appearing.
- **It fortifies hope:** Because the story belongs to the Lamb, suffering is never the last word. The new creation isn't escape from creation; it is creation fulfilled.

Revelation Overview (Lesson 4 Recap)

What kind of book is this?

Revelation is apocalyptic prophecy addressed to real churches. It opens by blessing those who read, hear, and keep (**Revelation 1:3**) and by "signifying" what must soon take place. That verb tells us the book trades in signs: picture-language that reveals reality. That means we must treat numbers like **2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 24, 42, 144, 1,000** as symbolic pointers, not literal tally sheets.

Purpose: Worship → Witness → Perseverance

Revelation's purpose is to pull back the curtain so we see Christ and then live accordingly. The visions reorder the heart: worship (**Revelation 4-5**) becomes the engine of witness (**Revelation 6-11**), which fuels perseverance under pressure (**Revelation 12-20**), until the Bride stands radiant in the new creation (**Revelation 21-22**). When our gaze is fixed on the throne and the Lamb, our knees don't buckle when beasts growl, bullets fly, or Babylon glitters.

The church as one covenant people

The book is saturated in Exodus and temple imagery. Its climactic city has **12** gates (tribes) and **12** foundations (apostles), echoing the **24** elders around the throne. The **144,000** and the innumerable multitude are two vantage points on the same redeemed people. That's covenantal continuity: one Bride, one kingdom of priests, one people in Christ. The "synagogue of Satan" language in the letters confronts the assumption that ethnicity grants covenant standing apart from the Messiah; Christ is the boundary of Israel, and union with Him defines the people of God, regardless of ethnicity.

(This is also the consistent theme of the entire NT, as foretold by much of the OT.)

Recapitulation: How the Story Moves

Revelation's **7** cycles function like a panorama: seals, trumpets, and bowls each re-tell the experience of This Age, typically ending with a final-judgment horizon. Interludes (like the sealing in **Revelation 7** or the **2** witnesses in **Revelation 11**) answer pastoral questions: 1) Who can stand? 2) What is our vocation? Later cycles intensify the picture from the world's side (bowls) and unveil the spiritual backstory (dragon, beasts, Babylon). The point isn't to construct an exact, convoluted timeline but to see the same age from many angles, with the throne room as the unshakable backdrop.

Putting the Frame to Work (How the 4 Lessons Guided Us)

Start in heaven to see earth rightly

We kept referencing **Revelation 4-5** for a reason: if we begin with beasts and bowls, we'll read the book with clenched teeth. If we begin with "*Holy, holy, holy*" and "*Worthy is the Lamb*", we'll read with steady hands and peaceful hearts. The throne room is not a detour; it is the foundation and framing device for understanding the rest of the book.

Read "This Age" as turbulent but tethered

The seals showed us the church's ordinary experience, conquest, conflict, scarcity, death, yet under the Lamb's governance. The trumpets portrayed God's measured warnings to a hardening world (thirds, not totals), calling for repentance. The bowls pictured the impending totality of judgment when hardness and rebellion persist. The details vary, but the frame holds: This Age is both tribulation and kingdom, and the end belongs to Jesus.

Unmask Babylon; Don't be discipled by her

Babylon's power is often more seduction than sword. She plays to the heart with comfort, reputation, and plausible idolatry. The saints must see through the glitter to the grift, and measure faithfulness not by finances or followers, but by fidelity. We live in the cities of men for the good of our neighbors while belonging to the city of God.

Keep the refrain of the letters

Each letter ends with, "*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches... To the one who conquers...*" Those promises lace the book like steel cable. They tie today's obedience to tomorrow's joy and eternity's consummation. Hearing the Spirit and conquering by faith is how each church's lamp keeps burning bright in This Age.

Teach the next generation to read symbols

We don't flatten symbol into prose, nor do we float into fantasy. We learn Revelation's language: lampstands, seals, trumpets, bowls, beasts, a harlot city, a Bride-City, a slain-and-standing Lamb. We train ourselves and those we teach to ask: What does this symbol reveal about Jesus, the church, the world, and the end? Then we act on it.

Pastoral Applications (The Handholds We Keep)

1. **Worship first, then witness.** When worship cools, courage evaporates. Keep the throne room central in congregational life.
2. **Expect ordinary tribulation.** Don't mistake hardship for abnormal Christianity. Patient endurance is normal; panic is not. *Martyrdom is normal for Christians.*
3. **Practice hopeful realism.** We work, pray, and love our neighbors expecting gospel fruit, while knowing the church will always be out of step with Babylon.
4. **Guard the heart from Babylon's catechism.** Identify what she sells you: comfort without cross, influence without holiness, pleasure without gratitude. Then refuse it.
5. **Live ecclesially.** Revelation was addressed to churches, not lone readers. The promises and warnings are corporate. We conquer together. *Do not abandon worship and fellowship.*
6. **Keep the vision of the end before your eyes.** New creation is not an epilogue; it's the goal. Tears wiped, death gone, God with us, the Lamb our lamp. Let that future discipline your present.

Frequently Asked, and Answered

- “Isn’t an idealist reading just spiritualizing or allegorizing?”
 - No. It refuses newspaper fortune-telling while insisting the visions reveal *real* realities, Christ’s reign, satanic malice, worldly seduction, divine judgment, and the church’s mission, across the entirety of *This Age*.
- “Does the first-century audience still matter to us?”
 - Yes. The book was written to 7 *real* churches. Precisely because it speaks in symbol and cycle, it still speaks to us without distorting its original address.
- “Why not expect a golden age before Christ returns?”
 - Because the New Testament consistently frames history as *This Age* → *The Age to Come*, with Christ’s return as the hinge. We expect real gospel expansion, but not a sin-free society before the Lord’s appearing. There are also insurmountable difficulties in the details of what an earthly millennium would look like, which cannot be held together with how the Scriptures describe either *This Age* or *The Age to Come*.
- “What about Israel?”
 - Israel’s promises reach their “Yes and Amen” in Christ and are shared with all in Him. Revelation’s imagery (gates/foundations; **144,000** and multitude; the Bride-City) pictures *one* redeemed people. The New Testament veritably SHOUTS (repeatedly) that “Israel” is no longer a national or ethnic designation. Instead, Israel, according to the New Testament is:
 - Reserved for those who are Jews inwardly (**Romans 2:29**)
 - Abraham’s offspring by being united to Christ (**Galatians 3:29**)
 - Those who have been brought near to the commonwealth of Israel (**Ephesians 2:11-19**)
 - Those who have been grafted into the olive tree of salvation (**Romans 11:17-24**)
 - Therefore, we conclude that Jesus meant what he said: the kingdom has been taken away from national Israel and given to spiritual Israel, a people producing its fruits. (**Matthew 21:33-46**; **Mark 12:1-12**; **Luke 20:9-19**)

Conclusion

The “table” we set at the start has held steady to the end: an *optimistic amillennial* hope; an *eclectic idealist* reading; a *two-age* timeline; a *covenant* people. Revelation taught us to worship before we worry, to witness before we speculate, and to endure because the Lamb reigns. We’ve seen *This Age* as a diorama, multiple vantage points of the same era, ending not in despair but in *The Age to Come*.

The last word is not beast or Babylon; it is:

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man,”

and

“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”