

# New Testament Explored: Revelation

## Week 3: How should we read the book of Revelation, Part 1?

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### (1) There are three primary approaches to the interpretation of Revelation.

#### (a) *Predictive Approach (Key Words: Code and Future)*

- Most familiar approach to Revelation, primarily in the United States (e.g., *Left Behind*).
- A focus on “the end times” (eschatology), which they interpret as the end of the world.
- This is the approach of dispensationalism, which divides biblical history into various “administrations,” sees a distinction between Israel and the Church, and therefore sees an eschatological necessity for a two-part coming of Jesus – rapture, tribulation, and millennium.
- This approach decodes Revelation by connecting symbols/images with later figures and events, especially those contemporary with the interpreter (e.g., Hal Lindsay, locusts in Rev. 9 = helicopters).
- Pictures: **Code** [deciphering], *Crystal Ball* [prediction], *Map* [1-to-1 correspondence], *Fear* [problems]

#### (b) *Preterist Approach (Key Words: Fulfilled and Past)*

- Most unfamiliar approach to Revelation, primarily in the secular universities.
- A focus on the past (“preterite” – is a linguistic term for past tense).
- This approach is a non-theological, academic approach that uses the historical-critical method.
- This approach views Revelation strictly as a document from and for its own time, a specimen of ancient religious literature. The interpreter does not see it as having a future reference (predictive), and maybe not a role for the present (pastoral-prophetic).

#### (c) *Pastoral-Prophetic Approach (Key Words: Lens and Present)*

- Most common approach throughout the history of the universal church.
- A focus on the present, which is given theological perspective and insight from God’s revelatory word.
- Stated simply, this is the non-dispensational approach, reflecting the majority of Christian traditions.
- This approach triangulates Revelation according to its (1) apocalyptic form, (2) prophetic intentions to comfort/challenge God’s people, and (3) pastoral role of calling the church to faithfulness in the face of suffering and conflict with hostile powers. A living and active word for every generation and situation.
- Pictures: **Lens** [discerning], *X-Ray* [perspective], *Compass* [orientation to true north], *Hope* [promises]

### (2) Test Case: The Design of the New Creation in Revelation 21:15-22.

<sup>15</sup> And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls.

<sup>16</sup> The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. <sup>17</sup> He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel’s measurement. <sup>18</sup> The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. <sup>19</sup> The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, <sup>20</sup> the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. <sup>21</sup> And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street

*of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. <sup>22</sup> And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.*