

Twelfth New Testament Summary Revelation

First off, please pronounce "Revelation" correctly. It is spoken of in the singular, not plural (a very common mistake). Revelation like the books of Ezekiel and the second-half of Daniel are characterized by a unique genre of literature. As you know, a "genre" is a shared form of communication. Sometimes that form of communication is historical narrative, poetry, wisdom literature, sermon, letter, parable, fable, etc. Sometimes that genre is "apocalyptic." Revelation is apocalyptic. The term "apocalyptic" means to reveal or to uncover that which is hidden. As a matter of fact, the English word "Revelation" is from the original designation "Apocalypse." This is a revealing or an uncovering of that which would otherwise remain a mystery, known only to God. This kind of genre is rich in symbolic and figurative language. Thus, Jesus Christ for example is depicted as a Lamb with 7 eyes and 7 horns (Revelation 5). To use the word "Lamb" immediately points back to the Old Testament clean-animal sacrifices that included lambs. Furthermore, St. John in his Gospel records John the Baptist referring to Jesus Christ as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29, see also 1:36). But why does the book of Revelation with its symbolism, connect the Lamb with the number 7, eyes and horns? These also have symbolic significance. Seven represents perfection (it is the number for example of God's Church in Revelation 1); and God rests on the seventh day and calls His creation "very good." (Genesis 1) In addition, the eye is a symbol of wisdom. Perhaps some of you are familiar with God Himself being symbolized by an "all-seeing" eye; and the horn is a symbol of power (the book of Daniel uses this to describe powers on earth like Alexander the Great). Put it all together and Revelation with its apocalyptic touch presents Jesus Christ as the perfect Lamb of God who takes away all sin and who possesses perfect wisdom and perfect power. He is God! /// Be aware, however, that people argue as to whether one should interpret apocalyptic books like Revelation "literally" or not. This is a false dilemma that generates unnecessary confusion. Proper biblical interpretation is ALWAYS to interpret a book "literally" according to its exact genre. For example, to interpret Psalms literally is to interpret it according to the genre that is poetry. There is no other correct way to interpret it. A "literal" interpretation of historical narrative is to approach it as historical narrative; and a "literal" interpretation of apocalyptic is to handle it as apocalyptic. There is no other correct way to interpret. What some people MEAN by "literal" (and this is an uneducated use) is to interpret something in a stale, wooden or hardened fashion. Such an approach applied to Revelation for example (that does not appreciate the symbolism and figurative language) leads to DISASTROUS results! This is the reason for example that some traditions present Revelation as a confusing and terrifying book. This is a tragic situation since the book itself is about THE VICTORY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST OVER EVERYTHING THAT OPPOSES GOD AND HIS PEOPLE! Again, it is a book of comfort and victory for those who confess Jesus as Lord. It is an utter shame that some would be totally intimidated by the book, because it quite frankly contains some of the greatest comfort recorded in Scripture. For example, Revelation 7:17: "For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Interestingly enough, the single most popular "American Evangelical" (popular Christianity) movement approaches the book of Revelation by denying that such a genre as "apocalyptic" even exists. That is, the very classification is denied in favor of a so-called

"literal" (but actually wooden) approach to Revelation that actually treats Revelation as describing events in earth history. Now, it must be understood that the first three (3) chapters do indeed describe actual history, but as of chapter 4, the book takes off into the unique characteristics of apocalyptic. Take note of what the apostle John writes at the beginning of chapter 4: "After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.' At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it." (verses 1-2). What is going on? To put it simply, John is being given a HEAVENLY VISION. He is now seeing things that pertain to spiritual realities that are not confined to earth history. This is not to say that this vision does not relate to God's Church on earth (it does), but Revelation is describing a spiritual reality that is above and beyond the categories of time and space. ///

In approaching the book of Revelation, there are four (4) major interpretive approaches: 1) Historical: That is Revelation presents a panoramic of the history of the Christian Church on earth (including some of its future); 2) Preterist: From a Latin term that means "gone by," this refers to time fulfilled. It holds that Revelation is about completed events in the Church's history; 3) Futurist: Meaning that Revelation is describing the future events that will come upon the earth; and 4) Idealist: An approach that understands Revelation to describe spiritual dynamics that characterize the Church throughout its existence. ///

Now, the popular "American Christianity" approach is futurist and this approach has led again to terrifying results. It essentially makes the book of Revelation with the 21 judgments described therein as predicting that all of these terrible judgments will yet come upon planet earth. There is a lot of suffering to come and in this sense, the book of Revelation predicts the worst suffering and horrific terror the earth has ever known. To put it mildly, this is an unfortunate circumstance, because again, the book is about THE VICTORY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST OVER EVERYTHING THAT OPPOSES GOD AND HIS PEOPLE.

You should be aware of the fact, however, that the futurist approach is not the position of the Christian traditions connected to the ancient tradition of the early church. For starters, the ancient Christian approach (shared by Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans and others) appreciates the fact that Christianity started as a Near-Eastern religion. This is highly significant for this discussion. You see a futurist approach depicts a "straight line" or linear approach to the book. Such an approach is highly "Western" in orientation; it is in fact a Westernized lens cast on a Near-Eastern text. The Near-Eastern text of Revelation, however, is not linear, but cyclical. As a matter of fact, the 21 judgments are NOT CONSECUTIVE, CHRONOLOGICAL AND LINEAR JUDGMENTS, BUT THEY ARE CYCLICAL AND REPETITIVE DESCRIPTIONS THAT REPEAT SEVEN (7) JUDGMENTS THREE (3) TIMES. Most importantly, these are not about 21 FUTURE judgments, but God's judgment on all that resists His Son and His people! That is, these describe the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ against anti-Christian powers REITERATED THREE TIMES (the number seven is perfection; the number three represents God Himself)! In essence, these verify the accomplished victory of Jesus Christ from the cross of Calvary when our Lord said, "It is finished." (John 19:30) The book of Genesis (3:15) describes this victory on the cross as crushing Satan's head. The two approaches to Revelation (linear vs. cyclical) could not be more divergent. ///

The more traditional approach, however, not only views Revelation as describing the completed victory of the Lord Jesus Christ, but it also recognizes that the last chapters of the book describe the future new heaven and earth. Chapters 21-22 describe

what all of us look forward to (this is the time after we die, after we go to heaven in spirit, after we return with Christ and after we rise from the grave; after all of these things and when spirit and body are reunited in glory, then and only then do we enter "the new heaven and new earth" that is exquisitely described in the book of Revelation 21-22). However, it is the chapter just before the new heaven and earth that has caused some of the greatest controversy in the Christian Church.

/// Revelation 20 is the only chapter in the entire Bible that mentions that God's kingdom on earth will last for 1000 years. In fact, Revelation 20 mentions this teaching six (6) times. Please understand that Christians across the board believe that Revelation 20 is about God's Kingdom on earth. The question is, "What does this mean?" Popular American Christianity takes the view called premillennialism. Notice the word within the word, namely "millennialism." This word refers to the belief in an actual 1000-year kingdom of God on earth. This actual idea of 365.25 days x 1000 is the distinctive feature of millenarianism or millennialism. By adding the prefix "pre" we have presented to us the most popular version of millennialism that says that Jesus will come (pre-) or BEFORE the rapture (remember our discussion on rapture?) and a 7-year tribulation. These events of course precede the 1000 years on earth (according to this view). This view is the futuristic and linear view.

The traditional view considers the 1000 years to be completely symbolic of Christ's reign on earth. Again, this view begins with the premise that Revelation is an apocalyptic, symbolic and figurative-language book. What is perhaps more important, however, is that this perfect symbolic time of "1000 years" is already taking place; the Christian Church is already in the midst of it! The traditional view is called "amillennialism". The word means no-millennium. This term, however, is somewhat misleading to the actual position. Amillennialism does believe in a FORM (a symbolic one) of the "1000 years." It rejects, however, that this means 365.25 days x 1000. Rather, the 1000 years represent a perfect period of time known only to God. Why does it represent a perfect period of time? Because the number 10 represents wholeness or completion. Consider for example the 10 Commandments and the 10 plagues in the book of Exodus. But if 10 is completion, what about 10 cubed? $10 \times 10 \times 10$ (ten three times). This is a glorious and an emphasized completion or perfection! It is the perfect period of time of God's reign on earth. It is God's-appointed time for Christ to reign supreme on earth. /// This reign, however, is not according to the worldly concept of power, but the spiritual concept of rule. So, when Jesus speaks of His kingdom to His disciples, He says, "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36a) He also says, "the kingdom of God is within [among] you." (Luke 17:21) The rule of Christ on earth is not through a political or physical kingdom, but through the rule of the Holy Spirit working through the ministry of Christ's Church that proclaims His true Word and administers His true Sacraments. The Holy Spirit leads people to saving faith in Christ, joins people to Christ and people become "born-again" and converted to the Kingdom of God. This is Christ's reign and it will last for a perfectly appointed time until God's appointed last day. The two views on Revelation 20 are of course quite diverse. /// The theme, however, is crystal clear. Revelation 12:7-11a describes "a war in heaven" and gives the results: "The great dragon was hurled down -- that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: 'Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of God, and the authority of Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who

accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb..." (Revelation 12:7-11a) There is no doubt about what has won the victory: the blood of the Lamb. This war was won a long time ago! It was when Jesus shed His blood to cover all sin and again as Genesis 3:15 says, to crush the head of Satan. Which leads me to perhaps the most important distinction between premillennialism and amillennialism in handling the book of Revelation. The former (pre-) view says that Christ has not yet bound the devil; the latter (a-) view says that the devil is bound.

This is why Jesus says at Luke 10:18: "He replied, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.'" and of course, 1st John 3:8b: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." In the pre-mill view, Jesus must wait for His kingdom to be established before He may bind the devil; in the a-mill view, Jesus' Kingdom is already established and the devil is already bound. The a-mill view does not deny that the devil "prowls around" on earth. He does (1st Peter 5:8), but he is also bound and per the power of Christ cannot harm His people. His binding in fact is so strong that the Bible tells Christians to "Resist the devil," with the added comfort thrown in, "and he will flee from you." (James 4:7) Revelation describes the victory already accomplished in Christ. In Christ, Dr. Espinosa