

Glossary

of technical terms often used when discussing the book of Revelation

Apocalyptic – the name given to the type of literature (“genre”) of which Revelation is a prime example. The name derives from the first Greek word of the book itself which is *apokalypsis*, meaning “unveiling, uncovering, or laying bare”. Other places in the Bible containing elements of apocalyptic include Daniel 7-12, Zechariah, Isaiah 24-27, Mark 13 (and parallels), and 2 Thessalonians 1-2. Other apocalyptic books were written in between the Old and New Testaments, such as 1 Enoch, 2 Baruch, and 4 Ezra. The common themes of apocalyptic are divine revelations of hidden things, the future, good and evil, judgment, and otherworldly beings and places.

Eschatology – the study or doctrine of the last things (from the Greek *eschaton* meaning “last”). The “last things” are traditionally death, judgement, heaven, and hell but can be defined to also include the Millennium, the Antichrist, and other future events. “Personal eschatology” concerns what happens to *me* when I die, and deals with questions of soul-body separation, purgatory, limbo, heaven, judgment, and final destination. Eschatology more generally deals with the events of the end of time from a bigger, more universal perspective.

Ways of Interpreting Revelation 6-18

Preterist – interprets Revelation 6-18 as if it was all about a past event (from the Latin *praeteritus* meaning “past”), such as the Fall of Jerusalem in 70AD, or the Fall of the Roman Empire.

Futurist – interprets Revelation 6-18 as if it was all about a period of final crisis just before the return of Christ.

Historicist – interprets Revelation 6-18 as if it offered a general chronological outline of Church history between the first and second comings of Christ.

Idealist – interprets Revelation 6-18 as if the pictures it paints are not necessarily specific historical events but give us general principles of spiritual warfare, which may have repeated fulfilments through the centuries.

“Let us illustrate with 13:1-8. When and how does the imagery of the Beast find fulfillment? *Preterists* see in the Beast the persecution of Christians by the Roman emperor. *Futurists* see a future antichrist figure, the man of lawlessness of 2 Thess. 2:3-8. *Historicists* find here the pope, who persecuted the Reformation. (But some Roman Catholic historicists would say Martin Luther!) *Idealists* think of state persecuting power whenever and wherever it rises to threaten Christians.” **Vern Poythress**

The Millennium

The Millennium is the reign of Christ for 1000 years described in Revelation 20. There are various different interpretations of this passage, which have implications for one's whole understanding of eschatology. The broad streams of thought are:

Pre-millennialists – or chiliasts (from the Greek *chilioi* meaning a thousand) believe that Christ will return *before* (pre-) the Millennium and then reign over an earthly kingdom for (perhaps literally) 1000 years before the end of the world, final judgement, new creation etc. There are variations on details, but this view was held by some early church scholars such as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Irenaeus (“Historic Pre-Millennialism”), many Puritans, and in a modified and more developed form (“Dispensational Premillennialism”) since the 19th Century by followers of J.N. Darby and the *Schofield Reference Bible* (such as many Pentecostal Christians, and Plymouth Brethren).

Premillennialists may also talk about the **Rapture** and the **Tribulation**. The Rapture in this school of thought is the sudden disappearance of all the Christians in the world, leaving non-Christians (and merely nominal Christians) baffled! This is based on a reading of Matthew 24:36-42 and requires a secretive second coming of Christ before the more “official” public one at the end of the world. Some of those left behind (see 1 Thess 4:17 for the idea of being “left behind”) later become Christians after pondering these strange events. There is great disagreement about the timing of it, but at some point in this systematic presentation of the end-times, a Great Tribulation (see Matthew 24:21) will occur lasting 3½ or 7 years. The rapture itself will occur either pre-, post-, or mid-tribulation. Eventually, Christ will return and the end will come. This is the basis for the recently popular *Left Behind* novels, which also have a distinctly “dispensationalist” approach to Biblical interpretation (on which see Wikipedia.org).

Post-millennialists – believe Christ will return at the end of (post-) a Millennium, although the type of Millennium here is a little different from that expected by pre-millennialists. The post-millennialist's optimistic expectation is that through the preaching of the gospel there will be a gradual “Christianising” of the world over a period of (perhaps literally) 1000 years before Christ returns, although there are wide disagreements over the nature of this. Advocates include writers such as B.B. Warfield (whose understanding of Revelation 20 is very much like that of amillennialists, but who is optimistic about the future on other grounds) and Jonathan Edwards.

Amillennialists – believe that Revelation 20 is not about a literal period of 1000 years, but a symbol for the whole “church age” between the first and second comings of Christ, during which the ascended Christ reigns from heaven through his word and the souls of dead believers reign with him until the perfect realisation of God's kingdom in the new creation. This has been the majority view since St. Augustine, and was shared by Luther and Calvin.

Pan-millennialists – are exasperated by the whole business and can't make up their minds about it, and so conclude merely that “God will make sure it all *pans* out in the end.”

Post-lactarian – someone who likes their tea (or coffee) to be poured into the cup *after* (post-) the milk, as opposed to a *Pre-lactarian* who prefers the hot stuff to go in first (*pre-milk*), or an *a-lactarian* who prefers it black (or is a drinker of herbal teas such as Peppermint or Camomile).

Confusion – the state of mind often experienced by the Central Focus or Homegroup member trying to understand the details of the book of Revelation.