

The Book of Revelation - A Preterist Overview

To be read in conjunction with <http://davidpfield.blogspot.com/2006/12/revelation-very-short-introduction.html>

(Heavily and gratefully dependent on James Jordan and David Chilton for the overall framework and quite a few details)

Remember the preterist story ...

1. Worlds come and go (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Joshua-Zerubbabel) but since the fall it's all "old world" (with various foretastes and improvements but emphatically still night time). A new day, dawn, era, world is needed.
2. With the fall of the First Adam, the old world was managed by angels
 - cherubim guarding the way
 - angels around the throne and in the council of Yahweh
 - God known through the Angel of the Lord
 - revelation mediated by angels
 - angels as tutors / guardians / judges - Acts 7.53, Gal 3.19, 4.1-7, I Cor 6.3, Heb 2.2
 - (Rev-n - angels are the agents of revelation/judgment because this is the old covenant world - if it were the end of history then we would expect men to be judging angels not the other way around.)
3. With his life, death, resurrection and enthronement, Jesus establishes a new world
 - the kingdom of God is at hand
 - new covenant in my blood
 - if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation
 - neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters but a new creation
4. There are three phases of the new heavens and the new earth:
 - a) individually, representatively in Jesus – AD 30
 - heavens are new because there is a man there
 - earth is new because the Spirit is resident
 - b) ecclesiastically, politically in AD 70
 - heavens are new because men not angels rule the world / occupy the throne
 - earth is new because of Jew-Gentile unity – one new man
 - c) cosmically, publicly, universally at the end of history
 - new heavens and earth
5. So the completed work of Christ there is the accomplishment and signal of the end of the first creation / old world. (It may help to think of first creation = old creation; new creation; final creation).
 - so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth from ... Abel to ... Zechariah ... truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. Matt 23
 - this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: "And in the last days it shall be ..." Acts 2
 - for our instruction on whom the end of the ages has come I Cor 10
 - Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children ... Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? Cast out the slave woman and her son for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman Gal 4
 - in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son - Heb 1
 - first covenant obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away Heb 8
 - Christ has appeared once for all at the end of the ages Heb 9
 - all the more as you see the day approaching – Heb 10
 - yet a little while and the coming one will come and not delay Heb 10
 - Sinai / Zion ... this phrase "yet once more" indicates the removal of things that are shaken – that is, the things that have been made – in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken Heb 12
 - Christ was made manifest in the last times / at the end of the ages I Peter 1

- Children, it is the last hour and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know it is the last hour I John 2
6. But the dismantling and judgment of the old world happens in a generation of covenantal transition rather than in a single moment.
 - Rather like the passage from pre-flood world to post-flood world. The old world is judged and there is a transition to the new world.
 - Or the passage from the Egypt world to the Promised land world. The old world is judged and there is a 40 year transition to the new world.
 - Or from the monarchy to the restoration era – the transition of exile and new exodus.
 7. In this case, the last days of the old world / transition to the new world take a generation. AD 30 to AD 70 are the last days of the old world during which time:
 1. the foundation of the apostles and prophets is laid
 2. the long-awaited mystery is revealed
 - Jews and Gentiles are woven together into
 - one new man
 - one new temple
 - humanity comes of age
 3. the gospel is preached to the world
Acts 2, Col 1 etc
 4. the old world comes apart (with considerable disturbance) and is finally judged
 - the temple is dismantled
 - Jerusalem no longer the centre of the world, is destroyed
 - and this expressed in vivid decreation language in Matt 24, Acts 2, for example
 5. and with this Jesus is publicly vindicated according to his own predictions
 8. This terminal generation of the old world, the last days, is a time of upheaval during which the church herself undergoes something of the suffering / death / resurrection of Jesus at the hands of those who killed him.
 9. But all along Jesus has promised his people that within a generation he will judge and dismantle the old world. As with the world before the flood or the world of the Amorite, so the old Jerusalem-centred, Israel-focussed world has reached the full measure of its sins and is due for dismembering judgment – Gen Gen 6.3, 5 15.16, Matt 23.32-36, I Thess 2.16
 10. The upheavals and afflictions intensify in the 60s with the Jews inciting the Romans to persecute the church. Things look desperate. The church cries out in helplessness to Jesus to come and vindicate himself and them and to relieve their suffering so that the new world of a bound Satan, spreading gospel and growing church (the kingdom) can continue to leaven the whole lump, grow into a huge tree, etc.
 11. Jesus says, “Hang in there, I’m coming very soon now. And in the meantime, let me explain to you the things that are happening and what is about to happen.” Announcement of judgment/deliverance which also constitutes a warning and encouragement to the church for the ages to follow.
 12. And that is what the book of Revelation is about.

An Overview:

“As a whole, the Book of Revelation is a prophecy of the end of the old order and the establishment of the new order. It is a message to the church that the terrifying convulsions coursing throughout the world in every sphere comprised the final "shaking of heaven and earth," ending once and for all the Old Covenant system, announcing that the kingdom of God had come to earth and broken Satan's hold on the nations. In the destruction of Jerusalem, the old kingdom, and the Temple, God revealed that they

had been merely the scaffolding for His eternal City, His Holy Nation, and the most glorious Temple of all.” (David Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, chapter 19)

Chapter One

Introduction to the book

1.1-3 – the nearness of the events spoken about (+ nearness material from elsewhere)

1.7 – the theme of the book

Vital importance of right view of Christ in his vindication and glory

Encouragement and pattern for the church

Chapters Two and Three

Situation in the various churches and Jesus’s response

Jesus will come to sort out city-churches where there is unfaithfulness (2.5, 2.16, 3.3)

And will come to fellowship with repentant – 3.20

Hour of trial is coming up the world ... but Jesus coming soon – 3.10-11

Not to fear; hold on; deal with false teachers; keep pure; keep humble; love Jesus

Huge promises to those who overcome – by doing above

Imagery relates to periods of OT history suggesting wider application but also reinforcing the point that the church is the True Israel. In many ways the rest of the book is an illustration, explanation and confirmation of the contents of these letters.

Chapters Four and Five

Throne scene showing the sovereignty of God over all history. Similar to the throne scene of Ezekiel which is in prep for judgment v Israel and which is associated with the scroll of judgement.

The Lion has conquered as slain Lamb and now opens the scroll. Scroll of judgment

The throne of God is at the centre of all things and is the source of universal authority. Christ approaches this throne and comes to share it. A glad recognition of the worth of God and of the Lamb for works of creation and redemption is the appropriate response.

This scroll plays a large part in the book:

- the seals undo it - 6
- the trumpets herald it (sort of *describing* the contents but not authoritatively announcing them) – 8-9
- the witnesses are to speak it – 10-11
- the bowls implement its judgments - 16

Though the seals and trumpets are not, in themselves, the executive proclamation of the Judgment, there are important parallels between them and the Judgment itself. Thus we find overlap and spiralling and intensification in the images used in the three main series (seals – 6, trumpets – 8-9, bowls – 16). All three describe what

- prepares or
- leads up to
- characterizes
- explains the impact of
- (and finally) constitutes

the Destruction-of-the-Old-Order-Judgment of AD70

Chapters Six and Seven

Seals – preparing for and leading up to the Great Judgment we have:

- gospel conquest??
- bringing interpersonal conflict
- and religious disruption / famine (depends on the image)
- and Death
- meantime, the persecuted saints cry out for relief / vindication – told “a little while longer”
- so judgment comes upon the old order

But during this time, the saints are sealed / preserved and their perseverance through to glory is guaranteed and displayed.

The pleas of the saints, then, are heard and result in the blowing of the seven trumpets.

Chapters Eight and Nine

Trumpets give a characterization and description of the End-of-the-World-Judgment - heaven-sent judgments echoing the plagues on Egypt, representing the affliction and destruction of those who persecute God's people, and in particular the casting of the temple-kingdom into the Gentile dispersion, the release of Satan and his hosts into Israel, the disruption of their governments and the subjection of the nation to demonic madness. None of these judgments lead to repentance.

Chapters Ten and Eleven

Just as between the 6th and 7th seals there was a vision to show the Lord's protection of the church and her ultimate vindication, so between the 6th and 7th trumpets there is a vision to show the Lord's purpose for the church and her ultimate vindication.

The church receives from Christ a message for the nations, is protected by God for the purpose of delivering that message but persecuted for doing so and then vindicated by God both in the success of their mission and in the blowing of the 7th trumpet announcing the arrival of the new world (which is the accomplishment of the mystery no longer to be delayed (10.6)). The message itself is that of the end of the old world and the arrival of the kingdom.

Chapters Twelve to Fifteen

A series of visions giving further heavenly perspective upon the events being described in the book.

- 12 – the conflict between Christ and the Devil followed by the persecution of the church
- 13 – the forces against the church – Nero-embodied persecuting Rome and high-priest embodied false prophet
- 14 – the victorious army of the Lamb described, three messages assuring the saints of the victory and then a two-fold harvest (which is which?)
- 15 – with the church 'harvested' we see her destiny – rest in the presence of God, entry into the tabernacle. As the saints go in, the angels with judgments go out.

Chapter Sixteen

Bowls of God's wrath are poured out which are even more like the plagues against Egypt, which give no break between 6th and 7th and which represent the real thing – the intense and final judgment falling upon Jerusalem/apostate Judaism in the late 60s and in the siege of Jerusalem / destruction of the temple. In spite of the fact that 17 and 19 tell us more about the distinction between Beast and Babylon (17 that the Beast destroys Babylon and 19 that the judgment of the Beast follows that of Babylon), here their common evil and their judgment is undistinguished. Persecuting Rome and the Jewish authorities still harbour war against God – they intend a final battle. But the city itself (7th bowl) comes to its end.

Chapters Seventeen and Eighteen

This is now filled out – the harlot city is fully described, along with her relationship to the beast. Jerusalem "has forsaken her rightful husband and is committing fornication with pagan rulers, worshiping Caesar, "drunk with the blood of the saints"; the holy city has become another Babylon. God issues one final call for His people to separate themselves from Jerusalem's harlotries, and abandons her to the ravaging armies of the Empire. At the sight of the utter ruin of apostate Israel, the saints in heaven and earth rejoice." (Chilton) And her fall is described in greater detail along with laments which confirm that this really is the end of an era. The millstone is thrown into the sea.

Chapter Nineteen

The people of God rejoice that this great judgment has fallen and with the harlot having been judged, the wedding of the Lamb has arrived and blessed are all who are invited to it. And yet, we next hear of this in 21.9-10 and there's more explaining to do first.

What do preterists do with the end of the book – is it *all* about AD 70?

19.11-16

Heaven is opened. Last time it was opened it was so that John could go in. This time it is so that the Faithful and True One may come out – riding out with his armies. He is a Word and blood conqueror who rides through the ages in Psalm 2 gospel conquest.

19.17-21

First thing he meets as he rides out are beast and kings of the earth and false prophet who have destroyed the harlot (17-18) and are now gathered together for the mother of all battles (remember 6th bowl). But they are swept aside in an instant and thrown into the lake of fire.

So now harlot has been destroyed by the beast and the beast and false prophet have been judged / overthrown. The only remaining enemies are

1. the dragon and
2. death and hades.

The dragon is dealt with in two stages.

20.1-6 – see Matthew Mason's superb paper on Acorn

20.1-6

First he is thrown into the pit for 1000 years. This is the entire gospel age and during it the saints reign with Christ and the nations are converted.

20.7-10

At the end of this period he is to be released for a little while - but only for the purpose of being judged.

Beale sees chiastic structure something like this:

- A. judgement of the harlot (17.1 – 19.6)
- B. the divine judge (19.11-16)
- C. judgement of the beast and the false prophet (19.17-21)
- D. Satan imprisoned for 1000 yrs (20.1-3)
- D'. The saints reign/judge for 1000 yrs (20.4-6)
- C'. the judgement of Gog and Magog (DF – better, the devil) (20.7-10)
- B'. the divine judge (20.11-15)
- A'. vindication of the bride (21.1-22.5)

So, yes, Witherington right that “The sequence of preliminary judgment, millennium, final judgment, new heaven and new earth in Rev 19-22 must be taken seriously.” If think that 19.11ff are the second coming then you ought to be premill-t. Beale argues from above “that 20.1ff does not chronologically follow 19.17-21” but the recognition of the pattern does not necessarily imply this at all.

Another way of interpreting the chronological implications of the pattern is this:

- A, B, C, are AD 70 judgements and they are paralleled by the A', B', and C' judgements at the end of history.
- There is a chronological progression. While the harlot of saint-persecuting Jerusalem and the beast of Nero-personified Rome and the false prophet of high-priest personified Jewish religion are destroyed in AD 70, the personal evil force behind them all, the devil, does not suffer the same judgement until the end of history.
- AD 70 and end of history judgements are therefore parallel. Or maybe AD 70 could be seen as a type of the end of history judgement.
- The use of “1000 years” for both 20.1-3 and 20.4-6 suggests that if any two parts of this schema are synchronous it is these two.

And just as there has been a tiny period between the definitive completion of Christ's work with cross, resurrection and enthronement and the full entering into gospel history (the generation of covenant transition between AD 30 and AD 70) so there will be a tiny period between the release of Satan and his final and complete judgement. Thus:

- A. The completed work of Christ at his first coming – AD 30
 - cross, resurrection, enthronement of Jesus
- B. Tiny period of covenant transition – AD 30 – 70
 - blending of Jew-Gentile church
 - gospel to whole world
 - last days of the old world / "preliminary judgment"
 - destruction of temple - vindication of the Son of Man

C. Huge period (1000 yrs) of gospel age

C. Satan bound for 1000 yrs

C. Saints reigning for 1000 yrs

C. Huge period (1000 yrs) of gospel age

- B'. Tiny period of Satan's final rebellion – end of history minus not long
 - Satan released
 - gathers for battle, surrounds saints
 - fire from heaven consumes

- A'. The completed work of Christ at his second coming - end of history
 - Satan completely and finally judged

- And if this is how it is then the restraint of the devil and the reign of the saints together describe the gospel era – the whole of history. And the period leading up to AD 70 may be a type or model for the rest of history. Throughout history there will be spiritual warfare, persecutors, slanderers, false teachers, the need to persevere, the privilege of prayer and praise, victories by suffering, preservation in affliction, gospel conquests across the nations, judgments of God, inspections by Christ of his churches in various places etc.

20.11-15

This is therefore the judgement at the very end of history. With the harlot judged (17-18) and the beast and false prophet thrown into the lake of fire (19) and the dragon thrown into the lake of fire (20.10), all that remains is that Death and Hades and those not written in the book of life should also be thrown into the lake of fire.

21.1 – 22.5

Which leaves a description of the city-bride, new Jerusalem. Spiralling from outer to inner:

- new heavens and earth
- new Jerusalem
- the walls
- the city
- the centre – the throne of God and the Lamb

This tells us what the world will be like when the new Jerusalem has come down from above and heaven and earth have married – at the end of history. But since the church is already the bride, invitations to the wedding

feast have already been issued and received, the saints are getting dressed up in their fine linen, the martyrs are already reigning in heaven and the saints on earth etc etc, the city is described in such a way as will bring home to the readers the privileges and responsibilities NOW of membership. This may be the kingdom in its absolute consummated fullness but it has been definitely announced already and thus its features are to be understood and experienced and lived up to even now. e.g. kings bringing glory in, healing of the nations etc.

Chilton again: “a vision of the Church in all its glory, comprehending both its earthly and its heavenly aspects. The Church is revealed as the City of God, the beginning of the New Creation, extending a worldwide influence, drawing all nations into itself, until the whole earth is one glorious Temple.”

22.6-21

Epilogue, closing exhortations etc.

Jesus is coming soon – 22.7, 12, 20

In contrast to Daniel 12.9, the events of Revelation are close at hand – 22.10

And in view of the major foci of the book (1. the end of the old world at AD 70 and 2. how things will be with the defeat of evil) right responses are urged.