

THEOLOGY UNBOUND — REVELATION SERIES (EPISODE 0)

Why We're Doing Revelation—and How We'll Read It

Today we're starting something big: a full series walk through the book of Revelation. And we're not doing it the usual way.

Revelation has been used to comfort suffering Christians—and it has also been used to scare the daylights out of people. It's been treated like a codebook, a timeline chart, a political weapon, or sometimes a book that Christians should avoid because it “starts too many fights.”

We're doing this series because we believe Revelation is actually a *pastoral* book. It's meant to form worshipers. It's meant to grow endurance. It's meant to call compromised churches back to faithfulness. And it's meant to anchor believers to the victory of Jesus in a world full of rival thrones. So today isn't beasts and bowls. Today is the runway. We're going to tell you why we're doing this, what kind of book Revelation is, and exactly how we're going to handle it—because this series is going to compare four interpretive frameworks and we want to do it honestly, without strawmen.

TRANSITION:

Let's start with the most basic question: **why are we doing this at all?**

A. Revelation is for the church, not just prophecy pundits.

First reason: Revelation is for the church. Not just for specialists. Not just for end-times hobbyists. Not just for people who like charts.

I want to read the opening blessing in Revelation because it's easy to skip—and it sets the whole tone.

Revelation 1:3 (ESV) ³ 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, for the time is near.

That is not the language of “this is an optional appendix.” It's a blessing tied to *hearing* and *keeping*. That's discipleship language. That's obedience language. That's church-life language.

Now listen to how John identifies himself—not as a speculative analyst, but as a fellow sufferer.

Revelation 1:9 (ESV) ⁹ I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

This book is written from inside pressure. That's one reason it matters so much.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS (choose 1–2):

- When you hear “Revelation,” what's your instinct—fear, fascination, avoidance, confidence?
- Has Revelation ever been used to comfort you—or to control you?

TRANSITION:

Second reason we're doing this: Revelation is hope—but not soft hope. It's hope with spine.

B. The church needs hope with spine, not escapism

Revelation doesn't mainly train us to predict; it trains us to endure. It reminds us who Jesus is in the middle of trouble.

Listen to the way Revelation introduces Jesus.

Revelation 1:5–6 (ESV) ⁵ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

That's throne language. That's worship language. That's identity language. You're not just "waiting around for the end." You've been made a kingdom of priests. That means Revelation is meant to shape how you live *now*.

Revelation 12:11 (ESV) ¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

Notice: conquering is tied to faithful witness, not earthly domination. That's a theme we're going to keep coming back to.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS (pick 1):

- What do you think "conquer" means in Revelation—power, escape, or faithful witness?
- Where do you feel pressure right now to compromise?

TRANSITION:

Third reason: Christians fight about Revelation constantly. So we're going to model a better way to disagree.

C. We want to model honest disagreement (steelman, not strawman)

Let's just name it: Revelation produces disagreement. But disagreement is not the enemy—*dishonesty* is. Strawmen are.

So here's a promise for this series: we will **steelman** the major interpretive frameworks. If you hold one of these views, you should occasionally think, "Yes. That's my view stated fairly."

We're not doing this to pick winners like it's a sports bracket. We're doing it to read Revelation as Christians under the authority of Scripture, with humility, and with a commitment to the good of the church.

TRANSITION:

To do that, we need to answer: what kind of book is Revelation?

What kind of book is Revelation? (apocalypse + prophecy + letter)

A. Apocalypse, prophecy, and letter

Revelation is three things at the same time: it's apocalypse, prophecy, and letter.

"Apocalypse" means unveiling—pulling back the curtain. It's highly symbolic. It's not trying to hide; it's trying to reveal spiritual reality through images.

"Prophecy" means covenantal warning and promise—calling God's people to repentance and endurance.

And "letter" means it's addressed to real churches in real places dealing with real problems.

Let's read the opening lines carefully.

Revelation 1:1–2 (ESV) ¹ The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ² who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

In Daniel 2:45, *sēmainō* indicates the symbolic nature of the Babylonian king's dream—a statue representing four world empires, functioning like a political cartoon.¹ This linguistic precedent carries weight: the appeal to this Daniel reference in Revelation's title and programmatic opening suggests that symbolic vision will permeate the book's communication strategy.²

Sam Storms (Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative) represents the **amillennial** position. He argues that *sēmainō* indicates symbolic communication as the book's primary interpretive mode, contending that “symbolic visions and their interpretation are going to be the primary means of communication” in Revelation.³ Storms explicitly contrasts his approach with dispensationalism, rejecting the dispensational principle of literal interpretation except where context demands otherwise, instead treating Revelation's “essence” as “symbolic imagery” that is “predominantly figurative.”⁴

That phrase “made it known” is often understood as *signifying*—communicating through signs. That matters. Revelation is a book of *signs* and images that interpret reality.

Now the letter frame:

Revelation 1:4 (ESV) ⁴ John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,

So if we read it like a newspaper, we're going to flatten it. If we read it like a codebook, we're going to miss it. It's more like a prophetic pastoral letter, delivered through apocalyptic vision.

Now listen to the setting:

Revelation 1:9–11 (ESV) ⁹ I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹ saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

This is for churches. It's meant to be heard. It's worship-instruction in a world of pressure.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS:

- What genre do you *instinctively* treat Revelation as—timeline, puzzle, poem, sermon, worship?
- How does it change your reading to know this was written to actual congregations?

TRANSITION:

That takes us to the key question: if it's so pastoral and church-centered, why are there four major frameworks?

B. Revelation is meant to be heard and obeyed

Let me say this plainly: Revelation was designed to be read aloud in the gathered church.

That's why Revelation 1:3 gives a blessing for the reader and the hearers.

Revelation 1:3 (ESV) ³ 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, for the time is near.

¹ G. K. Beale and Sean M McDonough, “[Revelation](#),” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), [1089](#).

² G. K. Beale and Sean M McDonough, “[Revelation](#),” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), [1089](#).

³ Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2013), [406–407](#).

⁴ Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2013), [406–407](#).

So our question in every episode is going to be: *What does Jesus want these churches to become?*
Not just: “What does this symbol correspond to?”

TRANSITION:

Now we’re ready to define the four frameworks without caricature.

The Four Frameworks (steelman definitions + what they protect)

Here are the four big frameworks we’re going to compare throughout this series: **Preterist, Historicist, Idealist, and Futurist**. These aren’t just random opinions. Each one is trying to solve real textual problems—and to protect something important.

I’ll define each one in a clean way, say what it tries to safeguard, and mention a tension it has to deal with.

1) Preterist (Partial vs Full)

Preterist readings say that much of Revelation refers to events in or near John’s own time.

There are two versions you’ll hear:

Partial preterist: A large portion of Revelation is fulfilled in the first century—often connected to Jerusalem’s fall in AD 70 and/or conflict with Rome—but this view *still expects the future bodily return of Christ, future resurrection, and final judgment*.

Full preterist: Essentially everything is fulfilled—including the “coming” language in a way that collapses the future bodily return and final resurrection. I’m going to say it clearly: full preterism runs into major conflict with orthodox Christianity historically understood.

So in this series, when we say “preterist,” we’ll usually mean **partial** unless we specify otherwise. What preterism tries to protect is obvious when you read the book’s time statements.

Revelation 1:1–3 (ESV) ¹ The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must **soon** take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ² who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. ³ 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, for the time is **near**.

HOST:

That’s not a small detail. Preterists take those statements with full seriousness.

TENSION TO NOTE:

The challenge is explaining how Revelation keeps working with full force for churches across the centuries if it’s mostly locked to one historical window.

TRANSITION:

Next: historicist.

2) Historicist

Historicist readings see Revelation as a prophetic panorama of church history—from the apostolic age through major historical developments, all the way to the end.

Historically, many Protestants have read Revelation as exposing the long conflict between true faith and corrupt power structures across centuries.

What historicism tries to protect is this sense: Revelation isn’t just about one moment; it’s about the whole age.

TENSION TO NOTE:

Historicist identifications often shift as history unfolds—meaning interpreters disagree on which symbol maps to which event.

TRANSITION:

Next: idealist.

3) Idealist

Idealist readings emphasize Revelation's symbolism as portraying timeless realities: the conflict between Christ and the dragon, the beastly nature of empire, the seduction of Babylon, the endurance of the saints.

This approach protects Revelation's ability to speak powerfully to *every* era—because the patterns repeat.

TENSION TO NOTE:

The challenge is doing justice to Revelation's historical anchors and its “soon/near” language without turning everything into vague generalities.

TRANSITION:

Next: futurist.

4) Futurist (dispensational vs non-dispensational)

Futurist readings hold that significant portions of Revelation—often especially chapters 4–22—describe end-time events still future.

Within futurism, we'll distinguish two broad streams:

Classic dispensational futurist: Often emphasizes a strong Israel/Church distinction and frequently reads Revelation through a future tribulation framework with Israel centrally featured. Many in this stream hold a pre-trib rapture; not all agree on timing, but it's common.

Non-dispensational futurist: Also reads much as future, but not with classic dispensational distinctives. This approach tends to read Revelation more covenantally and ecclesially, focusing on the people of God in Christ across Jew and Gentile.

What futurism tries to protect: the concrete finality of Christ's visible return, judgment, and the real defeat of evil in history, not merely as symbolism.

TENSION TO NOTE:

The challenge is honoring first-century relevance while also insisting on future fulfillment.

BRIDGE LINE:

These are not minor differences. But they are not arbitrary either. Each framework is trying to be faithful to what it sees in the text.

TRANSITION:

So how are we going to run this series so it's useful, fair, and worship-producing?

Series Method (repeatable grid + interpretive virtues)**The 5-part grid we'll use every episode**

Here's the method. Every episode, we'll do five things.

1) Read the unit.

Not two verses. A real chunk. Revelation is meant to be heard.

2) Identify the big idea and pastoral aim.

What is Jesus doing to his churches through this vision? Repentance? Endurance? Worship? Witness?

3) Trace the Old Testament echo map.

Revelation is soaked in the Old Testament—Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Exodus, Isaiah. We're going to slow down and show the Bible reading the Bible.

4) Compare the four frameworks.

Preterist, Historicist, Idealist, Futurist—steelman only. We'll state their best case, then we'll name tensions without mockery.

5) End with "So what?"

If Revelation doesn't produce worship and faithfulness, we missed the point.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS:

- If Revelation is discipleship literature, what kind of disciple is it trying to produce?
- Which interpretive question matters most to you: original audience relevance, historical fulfillment, timeless symbolism, or future consummation?

TRANSITION:

Now, let me give you the virtues that have to govern our reading.

Interpretive virtues (say bluntly)

Here are the guardrails. If we lose these, we lose the series.

Humility: I can be wrong.

Patience: We don't rush symbols.

Text-first: We don't start with headlines; we start with Scripture.

Whole-Bible instincts: Revelation is not isolated; it's a canonical climax.

Pastoral focus: We don't lose the churches while chasing speculation.

And here's a series rule we're going to stick to:

We don't treat secondary questions like gospel tests. But we also don't pretend they don't matter.

TRANSITION:

Two issues shape almost everything in Revelation interpretation: structure and dating. We'll preview them today and tackle them properly later.

Structure & Dating (preview only)

A. Structure: linear timeline or vision cycles?

Some readers assume Revelation is basically chronological—one event after another, forward like a timeline.

Others see the book as **cycles**—vision sequences that cover the same span from different angles, intensifying and zooming in.

We're not solving that today. We're putting it on your radar because it affects everything: seals, trumpets, bowls, and the way the book "ends" multiple times.

Here's what we *will* do: we'll let the text show us. We'll watch for repetition, recapitulation, escalation, and reset moments—especially the worship scenes that re-center the reader.

DISCUSSION PROMPT:

When you read Revelation, do you assume it's strictly chronological? Why?

TRANSITION:

Now dating—because dating matters for at least two of the frameworks.

B. Dating: why it matters and how we'll handle it

Dating is not trivia in Revelation.

A **pre-AD 70** dating tends to strengthen many preterist readings—especially those tied to Jerusalem's fall.

A **late 1st-century** dating—often connected with Domitian's era—is commonly assumed by many who lean idealist or futurist, though it's not exclusive.

Here's our promise: we will treat dating as a real historical question—not a loyalty test.

And until we cover it properly, we're going to keep our claims modest and our tone careful.

TRANSITION:

Alright. Let's finish by giving you the series arc—where we're headed and how to prepare.

80:00–88:00 — Roadmap preview (simple, listener-friendly)

HOST:

Here's the arc of the series in plain language.

1) Revelation 1–3: Jesus addresses real churches—what he praises, what he warns, what he promises.

2) Revelation 4–5: The throne room—the reality behind reality—who actually runs the world.

3) Seals / trumpets / bowls: Judgment and mercy, warning and worship, endurance under pressure.

4) The dragon / beasts / Babylon: The anatomy of evil and counterfeit worship—how the world discipless you.

5) Revelation 19–22: Victory, judgment, and new creation—the end we are meant to live toward.

Here's your homework—not busywork, but immersion: read Revelation 1–3 in one sitting this week.

Hear the voice of Jesus to the churches.

DISCUSSION PROMPT:

If the ending is new creation and worship, how should that reshape how we read the scary parts?

TRANSITION:

Let's close with the pastoral center—what Revelation is trying to do to us.

Closing charge

Revelation is not here to make you an expert in speculation. It's here to make you faithful.

It calls compromised churches to repent. It calls suffering churches to endure. It calls all churches to worship the Lamb in a world full of rival thrones.

So here's our invitation: come with your convictions, your questions, and maybe your scars from bad Revelation teaching. We'll keep the text open. We'll treat the four frameworks honestly. And we will keep coming back to the point:

Jesus wins. And his people overcome—not by hype, not by fear, not by obsession—but by faithful witness and worship.

Next episode we start in Revelation 1 and we set the stage: the opening vision of the risen Christ, the purpose of the book, and the first big interpretive decisions that shape everything else.

Thanks for listening. Let's get after it.

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- **Main question every episode:** “What does Jesus want his churches to become here?”
 - **Four views (one-liners):**
 - Preterist: mostly fulfilled near John's day
 - Historicist: fulfilled across church history in stages

- o Idealist: timeless patterns of conflict/victory
 - o Futurist: largely end-time fulfillment still future
 - **Guardrails:** humility, patience, text-first, whole-Bible, pastoral focus
-