"Themes, Keys, and Interpretive Strategies"
Revelation 6:1-8:5
Word and Witness: Vision of the King from the Book of Revelation
October 4, 2026

Sunday October 4 6:30-8:15 in the Sanctuary - Session #1 "Interpretive Themes and Rev. 6:1-8:5
Sunday October 25 6:30-8:15 in the Sanctuary - Session #2 "Rev. 8:6-15:4"
Sunday November 8 6:30-8:15 in the Sanctuary - Session #3 "Rev. 15:5-19:10"
TBA 6:30-8:15 in the Sanctuary - Session # 4 - "Millennial Views and Rev. 19:11-22:21" (edited)

Four Revelation Imperatives:

1. Endure suffering
2. Evangelize the lost
3. Exalt God
4. Expect heaven

Interpretive necessity: G.K. Beale "Interpret symbolically unless you are forced to interpret literally" (12). Why? The nature of the book is apocalyptic/prophetic. It is full of imagery that necessitates this interpretive approach.

Numbers: 4, 7, 12 and multiples feature heavily and symbolize completion.
Number 7:

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Number 4

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Number 12 represents completion with the 12 tribes and 12 apostles.
Interpretive frameworks:

- Preterist
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- Historical
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- Futurist

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- The Redemptive-Historical Idealist

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Address the cycles and/or the scenes in Rev. 6-22.

Rev. 1-3 (Scene #1-the church in the world) "Then I turned to see the voice…" 1:12

- Keys in this scene:
  - To encourage the church living under Rome's rule.
  - To correct the church living in discord with Christ's rule.

Rev. 4:1-8:1 (Scene #2-Suffering for the church) "After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven!" 4:1

- Each scene (apocalyptic picture) is for the church. But each scene has its own perspective. Who is the scene primarily for? In the case of 4:1-8:5, the scene is for the church to view the throne, history, and its own culmination in heaven.
- Keys in this scene:
  - To remind readers of God's sovereign rule through Christ (chapters 4-5).
  - To instruct the church about suffering and God's sovereignty throughout human history (6 seals).
  - To seal believers living in the world of suffering (chapter 7).
  - To declare salvation and to worship the Savior from a great multitude (7:9-17).
  - To articulate the culmination of history (8:1-5 in the 7th seal).
- Text: 6:1-8—the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse
  - Who is the rider on the white horse?

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  - Second horseman is about war and taking peace from earth. The second rider naturally follows the first. Peace is taken from earth when people/countries/kings want control. We have seen this throughout history. Beale: "The gospel itself produces peace, but the attack of Satan upon its

progress leads to war. The phrase **that men should slay one another** points to the persecution of believers, for the word **slay** is used otherwise in Revelation to refer to the deaths of Christ and his followers (5:6, 9, 12; 6:9; 13:8; 18:24). Even the "slain" head of the beast is a mockery or false imitation of Christ's death."[1]

- Third horseman represents famine and food insecurity—

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- The fourth horseman represents Death and Hades who have authority (under Christ) to kill. Jesus has the keys of Death and Hades. "The judgments brought by the four horsemen are not independent or separate from one another but parallel—as parts of an overall judgment."[2] (See Lev. 26:18-28; Deut. 32:24-26; Jer. 15:1-4; 16:4-5; Ez. 5:12; 6:11-12; 14). According to Beale, these judgments signify the whole range of God's judgments on the wicked in the OT.
- Wilcox: "… a sizeable proportion of those deaths are unnecessary ones caused by war and famine and kindred evils."[3]

- 6:9-11 – the Fifth Seal
  - Those "slain" by the second and fourth horsemen. Could be only literal martyrs or those "slain" through persecution and generally through suffering.

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- 6:12-17 – the Sixth Seal
  - This picture looks forward to the end. Beale, "The calamitous scene of vv. 12-17 assumes that the persecution of *all* Christians has finally run its course, and now all that remains is to execute final punishment on the persecutors, which strikes the very last note of world history. Consequently, this passage cannot deal with judgments of unbelievers before the return of Christ during an extended tribulation period, since they have not yet finished persecuting the saints at that point."[4]
  - Great Earthquake (also 16:18; 11:13; 8:5; note also 16:20 and 20:11 with everything fleeing from the presence of the One on the throne) suggests this is the final earthquake and judgment. Note also OT judgments (Is. 24:1-6; Ez. 32:6-

[1] G.K. Beale, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary,* 127-8.
[2] Ibid., 129.
[3] Michael Wilcox, *The Message of Revelation,* 72.
[4] Ibid., 138.

8; Joel 3:15-16; Hab. 3:6-11; Is. 34:4 "sky rolled up as a scroll"; Joel 2:31 "sun turned to darkness."

- Note the numbers: 6 parts of cosmos are destroyed: earth, sun, moon, stars, heaven, every mountain/island; 6 classes of humanity portrayed in 15-17: kings, great ones, rulers of thousands, rich, powerful, and every slave/free man. Six is the number of fallen humanity.
- OT allusions highlight the Lamb's rule and judgment. Within Rev. 1:5-6 is fulfilled in his judgments (6:15; 16:12; 17:12-18; 19:18-21). Connected with Mt. 24 (esp. 6-8), these elements of judgment (conquest, wars, rumors of wars, famines, etc.) are the "beginnings of birth pangs," not the end but the precursors to the end (Wilcox, 75).

- 7:1-17
  - "After" is not necessarily *chronological,* it simply means this is the scene John saw next. Four angels/four corners of the earth. The "four" is symbolic of the "whole" earth like the "four" riders are representative judgments on the whole earth.
  - "<u>Sealed</u>" suggests "ownership" or "authentication." Note 14:1 and 22:4 with the name of Christ/God written on their foreheads. Identity of the 144,000?

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  - "Great Tribulation"

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- 8:1-5
  - Silence, Prayers, and an Earthquake

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What do we do with these chapters?

- We see and understand—what God intended all his church to know throughout history.
- We pray —God hears.
- We worship —God deserves.
- We share —the world needs the gospel.
- We suffer and endure —like Christ.

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Rev. 8:2-11:18 (Scene #3-Warning for the world) "Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them." 8:2

- The perspective of this scene is turned from the church in the world to the world itself. If scene #2 was the church looking at itself through the course of history and into heaven's throne room, scene #3 is the church looking at the world.
- A key interpretive point here is that the trumpets don't necessarily follow the seals chronologically. To view the scenes in Revelation this way is unnecessarily challenging. The trumpets and the seals are concordant or happening alongside one another. A possible illustration would be character backstories in a film first with one character, then going backward to see the backstory of another character until they meet.
- Keys in this scene:
    - To reveal the judgments and warnings to unbelievers and sinners.
    - To disclose the disastrous realities of idolatry and rebellion against God. (Plagues resemble the plagues on Egypt).
    - Key verse to close this scene "The Kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (11:15). Both scenes culminate in heavenly worship.

- Rev. 11:19-15:4 (Scene #4-drama of history) "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail." 11:19
- Rev. 15:5-16:21 (Scene #5-Punishment for the world) "After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened," 15:5
- Rev. 17:1-19:10 (Scene #6-Babylon the harlot) "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters.'" 17:1
- Rev. 19:11-21:8 (Scene #7-The drama behind history) "Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse!" 19:11
- Rev. 21:9-22:19 (Scene #8-Jerusalem the bride) "Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.'" 21:9

- Revelation is not a book of *chronological scenes.* Note the repetitive pictures of earthquake and storm at the conclusion of cycles. Note how the different scenes depict the same event on multiple occasions.
    - Give interpretive examples from several sections for how the various interpretive frameworks take the text.

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What does each chapter teach?

- Acknowledge how the different interpretive frameworks interpret each chapter (seals, bowls, trumpets, etc.).
- Interpret according to best practices. What does the chapter mean?
- Apply the text. How does the instruction of the chapter guide our faith and practice?
    - Endure Suffering
    - Evangelize the Lost
    - Exalt the Triune God
    - Expect Heaven
- Revelation 6:1-8:5 The Seven Seals
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