

## SESSION TWO

# Four Ways to End the World

**Get This:**  
Learn to look for  
common ground.



# Session 2 Outline

## Four Ways to End the World

*Note: Refer class members to the session outline in their Participant Guides for note taking.*

1. The book of Revelation is apocalyptic
  - a. Contains visions and extravagant imagery
  - b. Arose from the Jewish community
  - c. Uses numbers symbolically
2. Revelation is *not* pseudepigraphical writing
  - a. Written by the apostle John
3. Two times that Revelation could have been written:
  - a. Emperor Nero (AD 54–68)
  - b. Emperor Domitian (AD 81–96)
4. The opening of Revelation
  - a. To the seven churches
  - b. God the Almighty (Pantokrator)
  - c. Three key things in Revelation
    - Tribulation
    - Kingdom
    - Patient endurance
5. Four ways Christians view the end of time
  - a. Historical Premillennialism
  - b. Dispensational Premillennialism
  - c. Amillennialism
  - d. Postmillennialism

## Key Terms

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**Amillennialism** There will be no (“a-”) physical millennium. The millennium is the present, spiritual reign of Jesus with his people.

**Apocalyptic Literature** Genre of ancient Jewish literature presented in the form of visions that figuratively pointed to hidden truths for the purpose of assuring God’s people of the goodness of God’s plans during periods of persecution.

**Asia Minor** Region also known as Anatolia, comprising most of the modern nation of Turkey (see Map of Asia Minor).

**Dispensational Premillennialism** God will rapture Christians from the world before the great tribulation. Jesus will return to earth after the great tribulation, before (“pre-”) the millennium described in Revelation 20.

**Domitian** Ruled the Roman Empire, AD 81–96. According to the ancient historian Suetonius, “Domitian issued an encyclical in the name of his governors that declared ‘Our Master and our God bids that this be done.’” (Suetonius, *Vita Domitianus*, 13:2)

**Eschatology** Study of the events leading up to the end of time. From Greek *eschaton* (“final” or “last”) and *logos* (“word” or “idea”).

**Historical premillennialism** Jesus will return to earth before (“pre-”) the millennium described in Revelation 20, following a time of tribulation.

**John the Elder** The earliest references to the authorship of Revelation suggest that John the apostle wrote the Gospel of John as well as Revelation and probably 1 John. In the fourth century, Eusebius suggested that the apostle John and John the Elder might be two different people and that John the Elder may have written 2 John, 3 John, and Revelation. The fact that the author of Revelation presents himself simply as “John” (Revelation 1:4) and speaks with authority as a representative of Jesus suggests that John the apostle wrote the book of Revelation and that the same “John” was both the apostle and the elder.

**Nero** Ruled the Roman Empire, AD 54–68. After a fire in Rome, a rumor circulated that Nero had started the fire. According to the ancient historian Tacitus, “To get rid of this report, Nero accused and inflicted exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, the ones called Christians.” (Tacitus, *Annales*, 15:44) This persecution seems to have been limited to the regions around Rome.

**Pantokrator / Autokrator** The Roman emperor was known as autokrator (“sole ruler”). Pantokrator means “all ruler” or “almighty.” In Revelation 1:8, John refers to God as pantokrator.

**Patmos** Island off the west coast of Asia Minor. According to Tacitus, people who threatened the peace of the Roman Empire were sent to coastal islands such as Patmos. Fourth-century church historian Eusebius reported that Emperor Domitian exiled John in AD 95. Eighteen months later, after Domitian's death, John was allowed to leave the island (see map of Asia Minor).

**Postmillennialism** Jesus will return to earth after ("post-") a millennium when the overwhelming majority of people throughout the world embrace the gospel.

**Pseudepigrapha** Writings ascribed to individuals who could not possibly have written the book. Often times, the ascribed author lived hundreds of years before the time the book was actually written. The book of Revelation is not pseudepigraphical because John lived during the time Revelation was written.

**Seven Churches of Revelation** The churches in Asia Minor to which John addresses the book of Revelation. The churches are: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (see Map of Asia Minor).

MAP OF ASIA MINOR



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## Before the Gathering

- Be certain that every participant has a Four Views of the End Times Participant Guide as well as a Four Views of the End Times pamphlet.
- Memorize Revelation 1:1–2.
- Locate the article entitled “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity” at [www.albertmohler.com](http://www.albertmohler.com). Print a copy of this article for each participant.
- In the Participant Guide, personally complete the study entitled “Four Ways to End the World.”
- Use the materials in this Leader Guide to study Revelation 1:1–9. (See Recommended Resources for some commentaries that will help you develop a more in-depth study.)
- In the Leader Guide, choose which questions and discussion-starters you will use during this session. The Leader Guide provides you with many options, but you will probably want to choose only two or three of these options.
- If you plan to use the Four Views of the End Times DVD or PowerPoint® slideshow, be certain to set up and test all equipment beforehand. For this session, use the segment in the PowerPoint® slideshow entitled “End-Times Words to Know.”
- Gather six 3x5 cards. On each card, write one of the following words: apocalyptic, eschatology, futurist, idealist, historicist, preterist. (If you wish to play Pictionary for the opening activity rather than Charades, you will need an easel with whiteboard or pad of paper.)
- Prayerfully seek God’s guidance for this gathering.

# Gathering Together

## Get Them Talking (10 minutes)

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¶ *As a discussion-starter, review Revelation 1:12; then, ask one or more of the following questions:*

- When you hear the word apocalypse, what comes to mind?
- The book of Revelation was an apocalypse. One purpose of ancient apocalyptic literature was to give hope to God's people in times of persecution and distress. How might the book of Revelation have provided hope for first-century Christians?
- In what ways has God given hope to you in times of distress or persecution?
- How does the book of Revelation seem different from other books in the Bible?
- What views of the end times have you been taught in the past? Describe as many views of the end times as you can recall.

¶ *Group exercise: Six Words to Know*

Organize the group into teams of three. Give each team an equal, or nearly equal, number of the 3x5 cards that you prepared earlier—but do not let anyone see the cards or read them aloud! Have the teams engage in a game of Charades or Pictionary, trying to guess the words. As words are guessed, read the definitions to all group participants.

<p><b>Eschatology</b> [ESS-kat-OLL-oh-jee]</p>	<p>Study of events leading up to the end of time. From Greek <i>eschaton</i> [“last”] and <i>logos</i> [“word”].</p>
<p><b>Apocalyptic</b> [ah-POKK-ah-LIPP-tikk]</p>	<p>Genre of ancient Jewish literature presented in the form of visions that figuratively pointed to hidden truths for the purpose of assuring God’s people of the goodness of God’s plans during periods of persecution. From Greek <i>apokalupsis</i> (“revelation”).</p>
<p><b>Futurist</b></p>	<p>Futurism treats the apocalyptic text as predictive prophecy about events that, even now, have not yet occurred.</p>
<p><b>Historicist</b></p>	<p>Historicism treats the apocalyptic text as a figurative retelling of certain eras of history.</p>
<p><b>Idealist</b></p>	<p>Idealism treats the apocalyptic text as a symbolic expression of the struggles between good and evil that occur in every age.</p>
<p><b>Preterist</b> [PREH-terr-ist]</p>	<p>Preterism treats the events described in the apocalyptic text as events that occurred in the past, around the time when the apocalyptic text was written. From Latin <i>praeter</i> (“after”).</p>

*Work through the segment in the PowerPoint® slideshow entitled “End-Times Words to Know,” briefly discussing each word and definition.*

**Take a Closer Look** (20 minutes)

Watch the DVD segment entitled “Session Two: Four Ways to End the World.”

## Seek the Central Truth (20 minutes)

Drawing from your personal study and from the study notes below, guide participants in a discussion of Revelation 1:1–8.

“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, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 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. 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, 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 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’”—*Revelation 1:1–8 ESV*

### *Study Notes*

- The first word of Revelation is apokalupsis (“revelation”), but what is revealed here is more than mere information. It is the person of Jesus Christ.
- “Soon” could imply “quickly” or “without warning.” If so, the point is that, whenever Jesus does return, his coming will occur so rapidly that there will be no time to prepare. Therefore, people must always be ready. Another possibility is that some portions of the prophecy did occur soon after John wrote these words and that “soon” refers to these impending events.
- The word angel means “messenger.” The angel who is mediating this vision does not speak until Revelation 17:15. It is Jesus—not any angelic intermediary—who remains central in this revelation.
- Verse 3 gives the first of seven blessings in the book of Revelation; the others appear in 14:13; 16:15; 19:5; 20:6; 22:7; and 22:14.

- John expected that this book would be read publicly in the churches, just as Paul had known that his letters would be read (Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27). This letter was intended not only to encourage future Christians but also to help first-century Christians make sense of events in their world.
- In Jewish apocalyptic literature, the number seven almost always pointed to “completeness.” The seven churches were actual first-century congregations. At the same time, the use of seven may imply that this is also a message for the complete people of God in every time and place. “Through the number seven he indicates the mystery of the church which exists everywhere”—Alexander of Caesarea, third-century martyr and leading pastor in Caesarea (Alexander of Caesarea, “*Greetings from the Trinity*,” in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament, XII*, ed. W.C. Weinrich; IVP, 2006; p. 3)
- “Seven spirits” might also be rendered “the sevenfold Spirit,” a reference to the Holy Spirit. Again, seven implies fullness or completeness.
- Emperor Domitian had claimed the title “Lord and God”; John declared Jesus to be “prince” over all the rulers of the earth, defying Domitian’s claims (see verse 5).
- Coming “on the clouds” is an idiom that referred to a ruler arriving in judgment (Jeremiah 4:13; Daniel 7:13; Nahum 1:3; Matthew 24:30).
- Those “who pierced him” is probably not a reference to the particular Roman soldiers who crucified Jesus in the first century. Because Jesus bore humanity’s sorrows and iniquities, every human being has “pierced” him (Isaiah 53:4–6; Zechariah 12:9–10).
- “Who was and who is and who is to come” makes clear the eternal, unchanging nature of God; he always was and he always will be.
- The Roman emperor was known as autokrator (“sole ruler”). In verse 8, John refers to God as pantokrator (“all ruler” or “almighty”), implying that the Roman emperor’s claim to be autokrator was a delusion, because God ruled over all the kings of the earth.

Discuss the section in the Participant Guide entitled “Looking for the Common Ground.”

### § Study Questions

- In Revelation 1:1, “soon” may imply that, while some events described in Revelation remain in the future, many aspects of John’s prophecy occurred soon after John wrote this text. The word could also mean “quickly” or “without warning.” Do some research and determine the most appropriate meaning for the word “soon” as it is used in Revelation 1:1.
- In Jewish apocalyptic literature, the number seven almost always pointed to “completeness.” The phrase “seven spirits” (1:4) probably refers to the completeness or sufficiency of the Holy Spirit. This phrase might be paraphrased as “sevenfold Spirit” or “all-sufficient Spirit.” The task of the Holy Spirit is to testify to the truth that is found in Jesus (John 15:26). What does it mean for your daily life to say that the Holy Spirit is “complete” or “sufficient”?

*(These questions are also located in the Participant Guide.)*

### Dig Deeper (20 minutes)

Drawing from your personal study and from the study notes below, guide participants in a discussion of Revelation 1:9.

“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.”—*Revelation 1:9 ESV*

### § Study Notes

- Although he was an apostle or respected elder, John referred to himself as a “brother” and “partner” of the people in the churches.
- John mentioned three key themes in this verse: Tribulation, kingdom, and patient endurance.
- Patmos is a small island off the western coast of Asia Minor. Sources outside the New Testament testify that individuals perceived by the emperor as political troublemakers could be sent to Patmos.

*§ Study Question*

- In your own words, how would you describe each of the three key themes?

Kingdom \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Tribulation \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Patient endurance \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*(This question is also located in the Participant Guide.)*

Drawing from the Participant Guide and the Four Views of the End Times pamphlet, define and discuss each of the four views of the end times: amillennialism, postmillennialism, dispensational premillennialism, and historical premillennialism. If you are using the Four Views of the End Times PowerPoint® slideshow, you may wish to review the segment entitled “End-Times Words to Know” at this time.

**Clear the Air** (Optional—20 minutes)

- Ask participants to write in their Participant Guides any questions that they had during this session.
- Watch the DVD Q&A segment for Session Two.
- If participants had questions that were not answered during the Q&A segment, discuss those questions.
- Feel free to use Twitter to send your questions about Four Views of the End Times directly to Timothy Paul Jones, using @4ViewsoftheEnd

## Wrap It Up (20 minutes)

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Hand out the article from Albert Mohler “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity” ([www.albertmohler.com](http://www.albertmohler.com)). Discuss which aspects of eschatology belong in the first tier and second tier. Emphasize that the specific features of historical premillennialism, dispensational premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism are all third-tier issues.

### *§ Discuss these questions:*

- How is the kingdom present in your life here and now?
- How is tribulation present in your life here and now?
- In what areas of your life do you need to learn patient endurance?

### *§ Prayer for the Road*

“Heavenly Father, reign in us so that we may reflect your kingdom. Messiah Jesus, work in us so that we may glorify you even in times of tribulation. Sevenfold Spirit, reveal through us your perfection and sufficiency. Three-personed God, to you be the glory and power forever and ever. Amen.”

### *§ Application for Daily Life*

Encourage participants to work carefully through “Four Ways to End the World,” the second session in their Participant Guide, before the next gathering. This week, participants will focus on areas of their lives where they need to learn what it means to endure with patience.

## Recommended Resources

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*The NIV Application Commentary: Revelation* by Craig Keener (Zondervan, 2000)

*A Commentary on the Revelation of John* by George Eldon Ladd (Eerdmans, 1972)

*The Kingdom of Christ* by Russell Moore (Crossway, 2004)

*Revelation* by Grant Osborne (Baker, 2002)

*Understanding the Book of Revelation* pamphlet (Rose Publishing, 2009) (ISBN 9781596362994)

