

Interpretive Views of Revelation

There are a bewildering variety of interpretive approaches to Revelation. Among the students of Scripture who accept that Revelation is divinely inspired prophecy, there are four main interpretive approaches. These four approaches are very general and within each are differing shades of opinion on many points. These “labels” are convenient, however, for understanding the main lines of interpretation of Revelation. Each of these approaches poses difficulty and is subject to criticism by the advocates of other approaches. What follows is simply a brief synopsis of each.

Historicist—Revelation surveys church history in its struggle against the foes of truth. Historicists view the prophecies of Revelation as being historically fulfilled over the course of time beginning at the end of the first century and continuing until the end of time. Beginning with Martin Luther, this perspective became the accepted view among the Protestant Reformers, who discerned in Revelation the rise of Roman Catholicism after the overthrow of Roman Imperial paganism. The Historical approach is presented in the monumental work of E. B. Elliott, **Horae Apocalypticæ** (1847) (Latin for “Hours in the Apocalypse”), and commentaries by Luther, John Wesley, Matthew Henry, Adam Clarke, Albert Barnes, and several writers within the churches of Christ, including J. T. Hinds and B. W. Johnson, among others.

Idealist (a.k.a. “Philosophy of History,” Allegorical/Spiritual)—**no single fulfillment; only transcendent principles and recurring themes.** The Idealist refrains from pinpointing the symbolism of Revelation to concrete historical events. Fulfillment is seen either as entirely spiritual or as recurrent, finding representative expression in various historical events throughout the age, rather than in one-time, specific fulfillments. Idealists believe Revelation sets forth timeless truths about the struggle between good and evil in this world throughout the church age.

Preterist—fulfillment is in the past, shortly after the time of writing. The word “preterist” is from a Latin word that means “past, gone by” (**American Heritage College Dictionary**). This approach views the fulfillment of Revelation’s prophecies as having already occurred in the ancient past, not long after the author’s own time. Thus, the fulfillment was future from the point of view of the inspired author, but it is past from our vantage point in history. Preterists differ over what part of the past is covered, some asserting everything was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem, others, that Revelation is completed in the fall of the Roman Empire in the West. Some preterists believe the final chapters of Revelation concern the second coming of Christ. The origins of Preterism are traced to Luis de Alcazar (1554-1613), a Spanish Jesuit (Catholic) scholar who replied to Martin Luther’s Historicist approach.

Futurist—everything after chapter three is yet to be fulfilled. Futurists hold that Revelation is largely unfulfilled, and chapters 4-22 foretell events that will only be realized at the very end of time. The Dispensational Premillennialists fall under this heading. In terms of popularity, many modern denominational people subscribe to the Futurist view. Hal Lindsey’s **Late, Great Planet Earth** and the Left Behind series (fiction) have popularized futurism in its dispensational premillennialist aspect. The roots of Futurism are found in the writings of another Catholic Jesuit, Francisco Ribera (1537-1591), who taught that most of Revelation was prophesying events about the end of the world. Until recent years, most non-Catholics shunned futurism and considered it “a product of the papacy’s self-defense against the claims of the Reformers” (Stephen Gregg, **Revelation: Four Views**).

Revelation 12-22 The End and the Beginning

Overview

Many of these prophecies in the final half of Revelation depict the hardship and tribulation that God’s people will face, but also the judgment of God that will one day occur. This section covers various passage about “beasts” which represent Satan and his continued persecution of the church. While the figures used in Revelation are figurative, Satan is quite literally waging war on Christians and the Church. We can expect hardship because of this, but there is much to keep us faithful. As frightening as our enemy is, our Savior is more powerful. In the end, the Lord will return to destroy Satan and all evil. When He does His righteous followers will be vindicated and saved, and moreover He will create a new heavens and a new earth. This will be inhabited by the people of God and God, the Spirit, and Christ will dwell in the New Jerusalem with their people! Knowing that, we can say with John, “Even so, come Lord Jesus!”

Suggested Reading Schedule

Monday: Revelation 12-13
Tuesday: Revelation 14-15
Wednesday: Revelation 16-17
Thursday: Revelation 18-19
Friday: Revelation 20-22



Regaining What Was Lost

It may be hard to remember everything that happened back in Genesis 1-3, but before you read the final three chapters of Revelation, it might be a good idea to go back and read those opening chapters of the Bible. Why? Because they have a direct correlation to the final three chapters of the Bible! While initial creation is described in Genesis, the New Creation is described in Revelation. And of course, in Genesis much was lost

because of man’s sin. In Revelation, what was lost because of sin is restored because of Christ. Here are a few connections between the opening and ending chapters of the Bible:

Genesis 1—3	Revelation 20—22
<i>Creation of heavens and earth (1:1)</i>	<i>A new heaven and new earth (21:1)</i>
<i>The darkness was called night (1:5)</i>	<i>There will be no night there (21:25)</i>
<i>Sun & moon created as 2 great lights (1:16)</i>	<i>No need of the sun or moon (21:23)</i>
<i>Satan appears and deceives mankind (3:1)</i>	<i>Satan is cast out forever (20:10)</i>
<i>Death promised (2:17)</i>	<i>Promised that death will be no more (21:4)</i>
<i>Man’s walk with God interrupted (3:8-10)</i>	<i>Man’s walk with God resumed (21:3)</i>
<i>Initial triumph of the serpent (3:13)</i>	<i>Ultimate triumph of the Lamb (20:10; 22:3)</i>
<i>Sorrow multiplied (3:16)</i>	<i>No more sorrow (21:4)</i>
<i>Man’s dominion broken (3:19)</i>	<i>Man’s dominion restored in Christ (22:5)</i>
<i>Tree of life is lost (3:24)</i>	<i>Tree of life is restored (22:14)</i>
<i>Driven from God’s presence (3:24)</i>	<i>“They shall see His face” (22:4)</i>

Interpretive Views of Revelation

There are a bewildering variety of interpretive approaches to Revelation. Among the students of Scripture who accept that Revelation is divinely inspired prophecy, there are four main interpretive approaches. These four approaches are very general and within each are differing shades of opinion on many points. These “labels” are convenient, however, for understanding the main lines of interpretation of Revelation. Each of these approaches poses difficulty and is subject to criticism by the advocates of other approaches. What follows is simply a brief synopsis of each.

Historicist—Revelation surveys church history in its struggle against the foes of truth. Historicists view the prophecies of Revelation as being historically fulfilled over the course of time beginning at the end of the first century and continuing until the end of time. Beginning with Martin Luther, this perspective became the accepted view among the Protestant Reformers, who discerned in Revelation the rise of Roman Catholicism after the overthrow of Roman Imperial paganism. The Historical approach is presented in the monumental work of E. B. Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticæ* (1847) (Latin for “Hours in the Apocalypse”), and commentaries by Luther, John Wesley, Matthew Henry, Adam Clarke, Albert Barnes, and several writers within the churches of Christ, including J. T. Hinds and B. W. Johnson, among others.

Idealist (a.k.a. “Philosophy of History,” Allegorical/Spiritual)—**no single fulfillment; only transcendent principles and recurring themes.** The Idealist refrains from pinpointing the symbolism of Revelation to concrete historical events. Fulfillment is seen either as entirely spiritual or as recurrent, finding representative expression in various historical events throughout the age, rather than in one-time, specific fulfillments. Idealists believe Revelation sets forth timeless truths about the struggle between good and evil in this world throughout the church age.

Preterist—fulfillment is in the past, shortly after the time of writing. The word “preterist” is from a Latin word that means “past, gone by” (*American Heritage College Dictionary*). This approach views the fulfillment of Revelation’s prophecies as having already occurred in the ancient past, not long after the author’s own time. Thus, the fulfillment was future from the point of view of the inspired author, but it is past from our vantage point in history. Preterists differ over what part of the past is covered, some asserting everything was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem, others, that Revelation is completed in the fall of the Roman Empire in the West. Some preterists believe the final chapters of Revelation concern the second coming of Christ. The origins of Preterism are traced to Luis de Alcazar (1554-1613), a Spanish Jesuit (Catholic) scholar who replied to Martin Luther’s Historicist approach.

Futurist—everything after chapter three is yet to be fulfilled. Futurists hold that Revelation is largely unfulfilled, and chapters 4-22 foretell events that will only be realized at the very end of time. The Dispensational Premillennialists fall under this heading. In terms of popularity, many modern denominational people subscribe to the Futurist view. Hal Lindsey’s *Late, Great Planet Earth* and the Left Behind series (fiction) have popularized futurism in its dispensational premillennialist aspect. The roots of Futurism are found in the writings of another Catholic Jesuit, Francisco Ribera (1537-1591), who taught that most of Revelation was prophesying events about the end of the world. Until recent years, most non-Catholics shunned futurism and considered it “a product of the papacy’s self-defense against the claims of the Reformers” (Stephen Gregg, **Revelation: Four Views**).

“That You May Grow Thereby...”

A weekly Bible reading plan



Revelation 12-22

The End and the Beginning

Overview

Many of these prophecies in the final half of Revelation depict the hardship and tribulation that God’s people will face, but also the judgment of God that will one day occur. This section covers various passage about “beasts” which represent Satan and his continued persecution of the church. While the figures used in Revelation are figurative, Satan is quite literally waging war on Christians and the Church. We can expect hardship because of this, but there is much to keep us faithful. As frightening as our enemy is, our Savior is more powerful. In the end, the Lord will return to destroy Satan and all evil. When He does His righteous followers will be vindicated and saved, and moreover He will create a new heavens and a new earth. This will be inhabited by the people of God and God, the Spirit, and Christ will dwell in the New Jerusalem with their people! Knowing that, we can say with John, “Even so, come Lord Jesus!”

Suggested Reading Schedule

Monday: Revelation 12-13

Tuesday: Revelation 14-15

Wednesday: Revelation 16-17

Thursday: Revelation 18-19

Friday: Revelation 20-22



Regaining What Was Lost

It may be hard to remember everything that happened back in Genesis 1-3, but before you read the final three chapters of Revelation, it might be a good idea to go back and read those opening chapters of the Bible. Why? Because they have a direct correlation to the final three chapters of the Bible! While initial creation is described in Genesis, the New Creation is described in Revelation. And of course, in Genesis much was lost

because of man’s sin. In Revelation, what was lost because of sin is restored because of Christ. Here are a few connections between the opening and ending chapters of the Bible:

Genesis 1—3	Revelation 20—22
<i>Creation of heavens and earth (1:1)</i>	<i>A new heaven and new earth (21:1)</i>
<i>The darkness was called night (1:5)</i>	<i>There will be no night there (21:25)</i>
<i>Sun & moon created as 2 great lights (1:16)</i>	<i>No need of the sun or moon (21:23)</i>
<i>Satan appears and deceives mankind (3:1)</i>	<i>Satan is cast out forever (20:10)</i>
<i>Death promised (2:17)</i>	<i>Promised that death will be no more (21:4)</i>
<i>Man’s walk with God interrupted (3:8-10)</i>	<i>Man’s walk with God resumed (21:3)</i>
<i>Initial triumph of the serpent (3:13)</i>	<i>Ultimate triumph of the Lamb (20:10; 22:3)</i>
<i>Sorrow multiplied (3:16)</i>	<i>No more sorrow (21:4)</i>
<i>Man’s dominion broken (3:19)</i>	<i>Man’s dominion restored in Christ (22:5)</i>
<i>Tree of life is lost (3:24)</i>	<i>Tree of life is restored (22:14)</i>
<i>Driven from God’s presence (3:24)</i>	<i>“They shall see His face” (22:4)</i>