

## Simplified Definitions: Revelation Interpretations

The way the Book of Revelation is interpreted gives rise to the various eschatological systems we have today. These options are usually defined as:

### **Preterism**

The prophecies in Revelation were all fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of heathen Rome. It merely covers the early church having no relevance after John's time. Problem: Revelation claims to be a prophecy (1:3; 4:1; 22:7; 10, 18, 19). The Second Coming is described and this has not yet occurred.

Advocates: Bossuet, Grotius, Hammond, Wetstein, Eichhorn, Ewald, De Wette, Lucke, Moses Stuart, liberal teachers.

### **Historicist (formerly 'Continuists')**

The prophecies are predictive of progressive history, from the cross up to today, being partly fulfilled, partly unfulfilled. The visions are sequential. It symbolically teaches the Fall of Rome (the seals), the rise of the Roman Catholic Church, the rise of Islam (locusts), the French Revolution etc. It depicts the Antichrist as the pope. Problem: does great injustice to many symbols, especially the Antichrist. Tends towards a rationalist approach failing to see the spiritual application. It ignores the matter of time constraints within the book (e.g. 11:2, 12:6, 14). Most importantly, it makes the book useless to those it was originally written for by John. Many historicist interpreters vary greatly from one another on details; there is no universal agreement.

Advocates: the Reformers, many older commentaries, Mede, Brightman, Isaac Newton, Woodhouse, Cunningham, Birks, Elliott (and many Germans), AJ Gordon, AB Simpson.

### **Simple Futurism**

Only the first three chapters relate to the historical present of John, from 4:1 refers to the Great Tribulation onwards; chapters 6-22 have reference to the absolute future of the Lord's Appearing (6-19), a supposed Millennium (20) and the eternal state (21-22). They use a strong literal interpretation. Problem: This is the mainstream Dispensational view, mostly Pre-Tribulationist. If Rev 20:1-4 does not teach a future millennium (which it does not) then this view is false. This divests the bulk of the book, and the warnings in it, of any value to believers prior to the end.

Advocates: Burgh, Maitland, Benjamin Newton, Todd, JA Seiss, CI Schofield, AC Gaebelien, HA Ironside, John MacArthur.

### **Extreme Futurism**

Even the first three chapters of Revelation are a prophecy relative to the absolute future of Christ's Coming—being a prediction of the condition of the Jews after the first Resurrection. Problem: This is extreme Dispensationalism and Pre-Tribulationism. The problems of Simple Futurism apply equally.

Advocates: Kelly, many Brethren.

### **Idealist**

The book is a summary of the continual war between God and Satan, or Christianity with paganism. There are no historical claims or predictions, just a picture of spiritual truth. Problem: this ignores the prophetic nature of the book, which is clearly described and explicitly stated. It diminishes the book's value to real people in history.

### **Spiritual**

The whole book is meant to be interpreted spiritually as a commentary on the heavenly warfare between God and the devil and its impact on earth, to encourage saints of all ages. It does however contain prophecies regarding future events to be carefully interpreted. The visions are parallel sequences from different angles.

Advocates: CH Alexander, William Hendriksen.