

Four Views of Revelation

<https://octabernacle.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/4-Views-of-Revelation.pdf>

Throughout church history, there have been four different views regarding the book of Revelation: *idealist*, *preterist*, *historicist*, and *futurist*. The *idealist* view teaches that Revelation describes in symbolic language the battle throughout the ages between God and Satan and good against evil. The *preterist* view teaches that the events recorded in the book of Revelation were largely fulfilled in A.D. 70 with the fall of the Jerusalem Temple. The *historicist* view teaches that the book of Revelation is a symbolic presentation of church history beginning in the first century A.D. through the end of the age. The prophecies of Revelation are fulfilled in various historic events such as the fall of the Roman Empire, the Protestant Reformation, and the French Revolution. The *futurist* view teaches that Revelation prophesies events that will take place in the future. These events include the rapture of the church, seven years of tribulation, and a millennial rule of Christ upon the earth.

Each view attempts to interpret Revelation according to the laws of hermeneutics, the art and science of interpretation. This is central to the debate about how we should approach and interpret Revelation. The *idealist* approach believes that apocalyptic literature like Revelation should be interpreted allegorically. The *preterist* and *historicist* views are similar in some ways to the allegorical method, but it is more accurate to say *preterists* and *historicists* view Revelation as symbolic history. The *preterist* views Revelation as a symbolic presentation of events that occurred in A.D. 70, while the *historicist* school views the events as symbolic of all Western church history. The *futurist* school believes Revelation should be interpreted literally. In other words, the events of Revelation are to occur at a future time.

The *Idealist* View

The first view of Revelation is the *idealist* view, or the spiritual view. This view uses the allegorical method to interpret the book of Revelation. The allegorical approach to Revelation was introduced by ancient church father Origen (A.D. 185-254) and made prominent by Augustine (A.D. 354-420). According to this view the events of Revelation are not tied to specific historical events. The imagery of the book symbolically presents the ongoing struggle throughout the ages of God against Satan and good against evil. In this struggle, the saints are persecuted and martyred by the forces of evil but will one day receive their vindication. In the end God is victorious, and His sovereignty is displayed throughout the ages. Robert Mounce summarizes the *idealist* view stating, "Revelation is an allegorical poem presenting the ageless struggle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. It's a philosophy of history wherein Christian forces are continuously meeting and conquering the demonic forces of evil."

The *Preterist* View

The second view is called the *preterist* view. *Preter*, which means "past", is derived from the Latin.

Full preterists believe that all the prophecies found in Revelation were fulfilled in A.D. 70 and that we are now living in the eternal state, or the new heavens and the new earth. *Partial preterists* believe that most of the prophecies of Revelation were fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and before, but that chapters 20-22 point to future events such as a future resurrection of believers and return of Christ to the earth. *Partial preterists* view *full preterism* as heretical since it denies the second coming of Christ and teaches an unorthodox view of the resurrection.

The *Historicist* View

The third view is called the *historicist* approach. This view teaches that Revelation is a symbolic representation that presents the course of history from the apostle's life through the end of the age. The symbols in the apocalypse correspond to events in the history of Western Europe, including various popes, the Protestant Reformation, the French Revolution, and rulers such as Charlemagne. Most interpreters place the events of their day in the later chapters of Revelation.

The *Futurist* View

The fourth view is the *futurist* view. This view teaches that the events of the Olivet Discourse and Revelation chapters 4-22 will occur in the future. *Futurists* divide the book of Revelation into three sections as indicated in 1:19: "what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later." Chapter 1 describes the past ("what you have seen"), chapters 2-3 describe the present ("what is now"), and the rest of the book describes future events ("what will take place later").

Conclusion

The book of Revelation is a fascinating book, and the debate regarding its interpretation will continue. Despite our various views, there are some common threads upon which Christians agree. All views believe that God is sovereign and in charge of all that occurs in history and its ultimate conclusion. Except for *full preterism* and some forms of *idealism*, all believe in the physical second coming of Christ. All views believe in the resurrection from the dead. All believe there will be a future judgment. All believe in an eternal state in which believers will be with God, and unbelievers will be separated from Him. All agree upon the importance of the study of prophecy and its edification for the body of Christ.

Unfortunately, the debate among Christians has often been harsh and hostile. It is my hope that the debate would continue in a cordial, respectful manner which will challenge every believer to accurately study and interpret the Word. We all await the return of our Lord and together with the saints of all ages say, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20)