

Course of Study

January 11	Introduction to Eschatology
January 18	Dichotomy or Trichotomy, Death, The Intermediate State
January 25	A Look at Key Apocalyptic Texts
February 1	Interpretive Perspectives on Revelation
February 8	Revelation 20: Brands of Premillennialism
February 15	Revelation 20: Postmillennialism & Amillennialism
February 22	What about the Jews?
March 1	Summary & Significance

Revelation 1:1-3: 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, ² who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. ³ 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.

Different hermeneutical principles and processes produce different interpretations of Revelation, and these varied perspectives then lead to different millennial views and end times chronologies. This is why I haven't started our study with the millennial views themselves.

Interpretive Perspectives on Revelation (There are subdivisions; there are 'eclectic' combinations.)

I. IDEALISM (typically Amillennial)

- A. Definition: 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.
- B. Hermeneutic Distinctive: "Just as the student of Scripture, recognizing the genre of a particular passage, refuses a literal interpretation of parables or of poetic literature, so that same student, recognizing the unique genre of Revelation, does not interpret Revelation from a literal perspective. In fact, acknowledging Revelation as apocalyptic, the idealist interpreter prefers a nonliteral approach to every verse in the book."

"The idealist, discouraged by a long history of mistaken interpretations of Revelation, insists that the clear teachings of Scripture take precedent over that which is not clear. The idealist does not expect a unique or new teaching to surface in the Apocalypse;" Sam Hamstra Jr. in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 129, 131.

C. Advocates: Origen (AD 185-254), Augustine (AD 354-420); prevailed until the Reformation.

D. Example Interpretation: The beast from the sea (ch 13) may be identified as the satanically-inspired political opposition to the church in any age. The beast from the land (ch 13) represents pagan, or corrupt, religion to Christianity. The harlot (ch 17) represents the compromised church, or the seduction of the world in general. Each seal (ch 6,8), trumpet (ch 8,11), or bowl (ch 16)

represents natural disasters, wars, famines, and the like which occur as God works out His plan in history.

E. Weaknesses Identified by Others: All concrete significance is removed from the prophecy, allowing for virtually any interpretation.

II. PRETERISM (typically Postmillennial)

A. Definition: From our point of view most of the events prophesied are past (latin *preter*), having taken place prior to (Rev 1-3) or during (Rev 4-20) the Jewish War of AD 66-70. Only chapters 21 & 22 are still future.

B. Hermeneutic Distinctive: The preterist views the Apocalypse symbolically, giving special attention to the encouragement John intended to provide to those currently undergoing persecution. For many preterists, the Apocalypse is divine judgment against Israel specifically, not all ungodly men. *“Revelation is a highly figurative book that we cannot approach with a simple straightforward literalism.* That being said, the preterist view does understand Revelation’s prophecies as strongly reflecting actual historical events in John’s near future, though they are set in apocalyptic drama and clothed in poetic hyperbole.” Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 38, emphasis his.

C. Advocates: Eusebius, John Owen, Hank Hanegraaff, R.C. Sproul, Kenneth Gentry; the preferred view of scholars.

D. Example Interpretation: The great prostitute of Rev. 17 is Jerusalem (not Rome), “Babylon the Great” (17:5). Jerusalem is called “the great city” in 11:8, and many OT prophecies combine Jerusalem being labeled “great” with references to its apostasy being “whorings” and “prostitution.” Rev. 17:16-17 refers, then, to the destruction of the temple in AD 70.

Revelation 17:1-2: 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, ²with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.”

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E. Weaknesses Identified by Others: Preterism depends upon an early date for the writing of Revelation, because the prophecies must precede AD 70.

III. HISTORICISM (typically Premillennial; Reformation historicists such as Luther and Calvin were not.)

A. Definition: 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.

- B. Hermeneutic Distinctive: Most interpreters place the events of their day in the later chapters of Revelation.
- C. Advocates: Various Reformers, Spurgeon, Matthew Henry
- D. Example Interpretation: The breaking of the seals in chapters 4-7 symbolizes the fall of the Roman Empire. The Trumpet judgments in chapters 8-10 represent the invasions of the Roman Empire by the Vandals, Huns, Saracens, and Turks. Among Protestant historicists of the Reformation, the antichrist in Revelation was believed to be the papacy. Chapters 11-13 in Revelation represent the true church in its struggle against Roman Catholicism. The bowl judgments of Revelation 14-16 represent God's judgment on the Catholic Church, culminating in the future overthrow of Catholicism depicted in chapters 17-19.
- E. Weaknesses Identified by Others: Multitudes of interpretations of the same text, a long string of predictive disappointments, and ignoring the Eastern Church in interpretation have nearly killed this perspective.

IV. FUTURISM (Premillennial)

- A. Definition: Futurists use Rev. 1:19 to thus divide the book: 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").

Revelation 1:19: Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

- B. Hermeneutic Distinctive: Literal whenever possible. While few actually expect to see a ten-horned, seven-headed leopard with bear's feet and a lion's mouth (Rev. 13:1-2), it must represent some distinct earthly ruler with equivalent political sway. Futurists also maintain a distinction between ethnic Israel and the Church, claiming that OT prophecies about the salvation of Israel are yet to be fulfilled.

- C. Advocates: C.I. Scofield, Charles Ryrie, John Walvoord, Tim LaHaye. This is the popular modern evangelical understanding.

- D. Example Interpretation: Rev. 11:1-13 refers to a literal temple in Jerusalem that will be rebuilt just before Christ returns, enabling a reinstitution of Jewish national life after the repentance of Israel takes place.

Revelation 11:1-2: Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, ² but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.

- E. Weaknesses Identified by Others: No relevance for John's original audience, who suffer persecution. The permanent Israel/Church distinction ignores key New Testament realities.

V. PROGRESSIVE PARALLELISM (Amillennial)

A. Definition:

B. Hermeneutic Distinctive:

C. Advocates: William Hendriksen, Anthony Hoekema, Robert Reymond

D. Example Interpretation:

E. Weaknesses Identified by Others:

	Who are the 144,000?
Idealists	144,000 is a symbolic number representing all God's people throughout all history under the old and new covenants (i.e. spiritual Israel).
Preterists	144,000 is a symbolic number of Jewish Christians who escaped the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.
Historicists	The number is symbolic and indicates the totality of the Church.
Futurists	The 144,000 are either a remnant of the Jewish people (literal) or the last generation of Christians alive during the Tribulation (symbolic).