

An Introduction and Overview to Revelation

Many believe that the book of Revelation is a book shrouded in mystery; a book so mysterious that only learned men and women who have studied professionally can understand it. This is not so! In fact, it is the only book in the Bible that pronounces a special blessing on those who read it and understand it! Surely, God would not give such encouragement, and give such a blessing, if it were not possible to read and understand!

Revelation 1:3* - "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand." Revelation is a book that has been blessed because God wants to encourage us to study and understand it.

HOW TO APPROACH STUDY:

There are four leading systems of prophetic interpretation currently in the Christian religious world. Each of these systems has many eminent advocates, and each group, of course, thinks that it is correct! These four systems are as follows:

Preterist View

The first is the Preterist System, sometimes called the Critical System. The term Preterism comes from the Latin *praeter*, which Webster's 1913 dictionary lists as, "a prefix

denoting that something is past or beyond." Preterism teaches that either all (Full Preterism) or a majority (Partial Preterism) of Bible prophecies had come to pass by AD 70. Basically, this system teaches that all Bible prophecies have already happened.

This school of thought interprets the book of Daniel as referring to events that happened in the 2nd century BC, while seeing the prophecies of Revelation as events that happened in the first century AD. Preterists and non-preterists generally agree that the Jesuit Luis de Alcasar (1554–1613) wrote the Preterist exposition of prophecy (published in 1614), during the Counter-Reformation. He was commissioned by the then Pope to counter the accusations of Martin Luther, that the Papacy represented the "antichrist", or "Beast" power of Revelation.

Historicist View

The historical system, sometimes called the Protestant view, states that the visions given to Daniel, were not only for Daniel's time, but were a picture of what would happen down through the ages, through the second coming of Christ and the world made new. In particular, these prophecies were especially for those at the end of time (1 Peter 1:10-12; Dan. 8:17, 26; 12:9). The evidence that the prophecies were true could be proven by looking to the pages of history to find accurate fulfillment. It also assumes that the symbolism of the visions was designed for us to understand. This system was held by all of the mainline evangelical church founders since



SECTIONS OF REVELATION

Revelation 1:1-9 INTRODUCTION

Revelation 1:10-3:22 SEVEN CHURCHES

Revelation 4-8:1 SEVEN SEALS

Revelation 8:2-11:19 SEVEN TRUMPETS

Revelation 12-22:7 SEVEN VIALS

Revelation 22:8-22:21 EPILOGUE/CLOSE

PROPHETIC INTERPRETATIONS

PRETERIST - Bible prophecies already happened.

HISTORICIST - Visions given to Daniel were for Daniel's time through the ages until the Second Coming of Christ.

FUTURIST - Developed to stop Catholics from leaving the Church and becoming Protestant.

IDEALIST - Sees all imagery in Revelation as non-literal symbols representing spiritual truths/conflicts rather than understanding the symbols are representing specific history.

their inception, until preaching of prophecy fell out of favor, and replaced by an emphasis on the gospel only. The gospel had been lost track of, and was brought front and center again in the First, Second, and Third “Great Awakenings” (revivals), culminating in the mid-1800’s.

Futurist View

The teaching of what some call “Jesuit Futurism” was derived by the same motives that caused Preterism to come into existence. The Jesuit priest, Francisco Ribera, was given the charge by the largest church of his day, to do something to stem the tide of those leaving the Church and becoming Protestant. He spent a number of years re-interpreting Bible prophecy to point out that the founding fathers of Protestantism were in error in naming the Papal system as the antichrist power; because, according to Ribera, the antichrist power would not be seen until the end of time, way in the future. He wrote his new interpretation predominantly for Catholics, and this was successful in stopping the exodus to a large degree.

It was not until the mid to late 1800’s that this teaching began to become popular in Protestant churches. In fact, none of the founders of evangelical, or “mainline” Christianity, ever believed or taught that the major fulfillment of prophecy would be cut off from their timeline (Historical teaching), and shoved down to the end of time as Ribera taught.

Idealist View

Idealism in Christian eschatology is an interpretation of the book of Revelation that sees all of the imagery of the book as non-literal symbols representing spiritual truths/conflicts rather than understanding the symbols are representing specific history.

In this series we hold fast to the Historicist view of interpretation, understood correctly by Martin Luther, and all of the great reformers and preachers from the 1600’s to the 1800’s. Not because a sense of pure traditionalism, but because, as you will see in the coming lessons, it is in perfect harmony with itself, is verifiable in the pages of history, it reveals the work of Christ in its symbols and signs and in principle it reflects the character of the Author of Revelation “who is, and who was, and who is to come” (Revelation 1:4, 8, 19).

REPEAT AND ENLARGE . . .

We don’t have to be confused about events that are taking place in the world that aren’t identified in Bible prophecy. God is telling us exactly how it plays out. He tells us once in the seven churches. He tells us the same things again in the seven seals, only with added detail. He tells us the same thing

again in the seven trumpets, with more details. He tells us again in the fourth prophetic cycle of the woman, the dragon and the beast, again with added details. Every time He brings us another cycle of these events, He gives more details for us so that we can understand them.

In this way, you’re checking yourself, because the prophecies are “repeat and enlarge”. So something that is just out of the blue and doesn’t match what you’ve seen before—you know that can’t be it—because you are repeating and enlarging. In fact, the book of Revelation, and the idea that it is a summary

of the entire Bible—guess what?—the entire Bible is written this way, “repeat and enlarge.” For example, Genesis 2 is a repeat and enlargement of Genesis 1. Likewise Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are all repeat and enlargements on the law of God.

Daniel 2, 7, 8 and 11 is an example we mentioned earlier. Add to that

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, repeating and enlarging on the Incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

AN OVERVIEW:

We will be studying the four main sections of Revelation. Revelation 1:1-9 is the Introduction, or the Prologue. Revelation 1:10-3:22 are the seven churches. Revelation 4-8:1 are the seven seals. Revelation 8:2-11:19 are the seven trumpets. Then, Revelation 12, all the way through 22:7, is the seven vials or bowls. Revelation 22:8-22:21 is the Epilogue or the Close. That will be the basic layout of the book of Revelation as we move through it step by step.

Those are the basic sections of Revelation, the 7 Churches, the 7 Seals, the 7 Trumpets, and the last section, the 7 bowls or vials. All of those sections are repeat and enlarge with each telling the same story from a different angle. It is very similar to Daniel. Daniel 2, 7, 8 & 11 are the four chapters that repeat and enlarge on the same basic theme. So you’ve got an introduction in Revelation 1, and a close in Revelation 22, then you have these four basic themes or stories that are told from different angles covering the same ground and giving more insight and more understanding. We can call them “prophetic cycles”, like the cycle of a washing machine. A larger part of the fourth prophetic cycle that begins in Revelation chapter 12 applies to end time events. It is in this final prophetic cycle that last day events are magnified. End time events that were touched upon in the previous cycles or the churches, seals and trumpets are in this fourth and final cycle magnified in more detail. ★

* If you have never read the Bible before, it is important to know how to find verse references. First, the Bible book is given. In this case, Revelation is the book name. Next, the chapter number is given, followed by a colon (:). After the colon, the verse numbers are given. So, for example, Rev.1:3 would be the first chapter of Revelation, and verse 3.

An Introduction and Overview to Revelation

Question & Answers

1. Were the prophecies of the Bible meant to be locked in darkness and not understood? _____
2. Which scripture tells us that God has a blessing for those who read the prophecies and understand them?

3. Because of the idea of “repeat and enlarge,” is it evident that there is a divine plan and order to the book of Revelation?

4. What are the four mains schools of Prophetic Interpretation? _____, _____,
_____, _____
5. Which view of interpretation is presented in Salvation through Symbols and Signs? _____

Personal Application

Are you willing to commit yourself to understand God’s message to you? _____

