

# Revelation

Notes #1A

Introduction

Little effort is going to be expended on introducing John's Patmos vision or the *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, for most Christians know of the book and its significance and many have a view of how to interpret it.

## Interpretations of Revelation

By way of introduction, let us start by listing the major ways that this profound prophetic vision is interpreted. Depending on the source, there are from four to six interpretative schools of thought.

As with most schools, there are permutations or variations within each school, which leads to variations even in the descriptions of them. No attempt is made in what follows to explain them or sort them out.

*Chronological and Background Charts of the New Testament* by H. Wayne House (Zondervan Publishing House, 1981, page 145) summarizes the major interpretations of Revelation according to four schools, breaking them down according to the chapters of Revelation.

Chapters	1-3	4-19	20-22
<b>Preterist</b>	Historic churches	Symbolic of contemporary conditions	Symbolic of heaven and victory
<b>Idealist</b>	Historic churches	Symbolic of conflict of good and evil	Victory of good
<b>Historicist</b>	Historic churches	Symbolic of events of history; fall of Rome, Mohammedanism, papacy, Reformation	Final judgment, millennial (?), eternal state
<b>Futuristic</b>	Historic churches and/or seven stages of church history	Future tribulation; concentrated judgments on apostate church and on antichrist coming of Christ	Millennial kingdom; judgment of wicked dead; eternal state

This chart is helpful, but it does not offer enough explanation and leaves out two other schools. The following has been compiled from several sources.

### 1) Preterist

The Preterist School sees John's vision as veiled language about events in John's day and leading up to the end of the Roman Empire or possibly the time of Constantine. In this sense, the preterists have a short-term historical view. Mostly, Revelation is viewed as a symbolic account of the persecution that the embryonic first century church suffered under Roman rule. It is seen as a source of encouragement for the saints that were suffering trial and tribulation during this period. The beast is seen as the Roman Empire and, at times, specific Roman emperors, such as Nero. This school downplays any future application, which would include our day as well, and sees their strongest argument in the fact that Revelation was written to the seven existing churches in Asia in John's day.

## 2) Idealist

The Idealist School sees John's vision as primarily portraying principles that are valid for all Christians in all eras of Church history. In other words, Revelation transcends the historical setting. As such, in John's day, the beast was the Roman Empire but subsequent generations have also experienced a succession of "beast" empires that have continued to our day. Christians have suffered persecution down through the centuries so that each suffering generation should be able to identify with the beast symbology of John's vision and see it as applying to them. The symbols can be viewed as either actual events or people, or simply as principles that apply to a variety of common human experiences.

## 3) Holistic-Theological

The Holistic-Theological School is sort of a combination of the preterist and the idealist views. As such, John's vision is seen as a symbolic account of the early church and is a message from the first century church of how God enables His people to deal with trial and tribulation. It is more of a holistic approach in which there is a dual message of hope and victory for God's oppressed people and of ultimate failure of man's institutions that have stood against God in the world.

## 4) Spiritualist, Allegorist

The Spiritualist School denies any historical significance to Revelation. It deems the book as a pictorial representation, in highly figurative language, of God's divine government applicable to all times. A permutation of this school says that the book is all allegorical, again, with no historical significance. An *allegory* is "a story in which people, things, and happenings have another meaning, as in a fable or parable or symbolical narration; used for teaching and explaining."

## 5) Historicist

The Historicist School sees John's vision as an outline of either the whole of human history or, more specifically, the whole of Church history from John's day to the Second Coming of Christ and beyond. However, there are at least two views held within this school; one deals with all of human history, and the other deals with simply Church history. Either way, John's vision is seen as depicting actual historical events as revealed through the many symbols portrayed. The reformers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century mostly held this view. At some point in time, John's vision catches up to our present day. In this sense, there is a futurist aspect to the historicist school.

## 6) Futurist

The Futurist School sees John's vision as strictly a picture of end-time events and what many call the "end of the world." It centers on the time of the Lord's Second Coming. Only the first three chapters are seen as more contemporaneous to John with the rest of the book being yet future. As such, this school is looking and waiting for certain events to occur to trigger the commencement of the bulk of the vision. Some state that this was the view held by the early church. However, this is misleading, for it implies that all other schools of thought are erroneous. The fact is that everything in front of the early church was futuristic and historical. Many evangelical Christians seem to hold this view as they wait for the so-called "rapture" and the rise of the antichrist.

To this last point, there are two divisions within this school. The first sees Revelation initially written to the seven churches in Asia; however, it will reach its final fulfillment when the last of several successive antichrists appears and Christ returns in the future. The second view is what

is called **dispensationalism**. In its extreme sense, there is a sharp distinction made between Israel (of the flesh) and the Church. The seven letters deal with seven ages of Church history, but after this, the Church is raptured and the rest of Revelation is strictly about Israel and the world going through great tribulation for 3½ years (or, 7 years by some accounts).

### Theological Perspectives on Revelation

Now, these schools are also influenced by one's theological view of the millennium, that is, the 1,000-year reign of Christ and what takes place in reference to this age and what is popularly called the "rapture."

Again, the following chart comes from the *Chronological and Background Charts of the New Testament*.

Chapters	1-3	4-19	20-22
<b>Amillennial</b>	Historic churches	Generally historicist	No literal 1000 year reign; coming of Christ; judgment; eternal state
<b>Premillennial</b>	Historic churches representative of historical stages	Generally futuristic	Literal 1000 year reign; judgment of Great White Throne; New Jerusalem
<b>Postmillennial</b>	Historic churches	Generally historicist	Victory of Christianity over the world prior to the Second Coming
<b>Apocalyptic</b>	Historic churches	Generally preterist	Symbolic of heaven and victory

#### 1) Amillennialism

This view does not believe in a literal millennium, meaning the 1,000 years is symbolic for the whole time between the life of Jesus on earth and His Second Coming. Thus, it is a or without the millennium.

#### 2) Premillennialism

This view sees the "rapture," the appearing of an antichrist, and the tribulation as occurring before Christ's Second Coming in victory. Thus, it is *pre* or before the millennium.

However, among those who see a rapture that removes Christians from the earth, not all agree on the timing of it. Many are taught that this is the great escape from a great tribulation that will engulf the nations of the earth that will lead to near destruction of all things on earth. This is called the **pre-tribulation rapture**. Some see it occurring in the middle of the tribulation, which is described as the **mid-tribulation rapture**; and some see it occurring at the end of the tribulation, which is described as the **post-tribulation rapture**. Yet, there is still another view that is described as the **pre-wrath rapture**, which means that Christians will go through the tribulation but will be removed before the final wrath of God is poured out on the earth. Consequently, this view makes a distinction between tribulation and wrath.

### 3) Postmillennialism

This view believes that Christ will return only after the church has risen to its height of glory on earth. This is post-millennialism. Some see a 1,000-years; others spiritualize the 1,000 years.

Well, this is a very brief summary of the various schools of thought on this matter.

As I have studied them, I have come to see some merit in some aspects of each one. However, as I was exercised in my spirit to understand more of John's Patmos vision, especially in light of our present hour, I began to see the merit of the historicist view, so I began to compile study notes as I researched the subject.

What follows is the result of this study that continues. It is not completed as of this writing, so it is a **work-in-progress**.

Rather than wait until it is fully completed, I decided to post what I have gleaned so far. To this end, the meat of the study begins in chapter 6 of Revelation and, at this time, ends with chapter 11. Lord willing, I will continue beyond chapter 11 and fill in the earlier chapters; but frankly, I am in no rush at the moment, so check back every so often to see what has been added.

Two final thoughts:

First, these study notes are not intended to defend the historicist school of thought; rather, they are simply presented for the reader's discernment, encouragement, and edification. You will also note that I periodically delve into the other schools of thought to offer alternatives for consideration. So, in this sense, these notes are not purely historicist.

Think of it this way; this study will save you hours of research if you are interested in the historical perspective of the book of Revelation. If you are more inclined to the futuristic school, there are plenty of books on the market that fill this need.

Second, appendices are referenced throughout the notes. Some topics that require further explanation are covered in appendices that stand separate from the study notes, many of which are from *The Upward Call* periodical or the *All Things in Christ* articles found on my web site.