

Past, Present, or Future?

There are several schools of thought concerning what Revelation is all about. I'll briefly outline four:

Premillennialism – “It’s in the future.”

The most popular viewpoint is that Revelation deals with the future—specifically, the end of the world as we know it today. This method relies on comparing current events with bible prophecy to unlock the book’s meaning. The problem with this approach (called *Futurism*) is that while God’s Word remains the same, current events are forever changing. Embracing newspaper exegesis is to be cast about by every wind of doctrine that blows our way. (Eph 4:14) It is a here-today-gone-tomorrow method of interpretation that will never answer Revelation’s riddles. Individual authors who’ve sold millions of books in the 1970’s, “proving” the end of the world was upon us by using Revelation, have had to quietly re-write their books to accommodate changing events. Additionally, anything concerning events thousands of years in the future would have had little meaning to those living during John’s time. Moreover, many passages state that things were “shortly to come to pass,” which we will discuss later.

Post-Millennialism – “It’s being fulfilled.”

Many see Revelation from a historical interpretation. In other words, it speaks of the entire time between Christ’s birth and His future second coming and end of the world. Some images are fulfilled while others remain to be met in the future. In a sense, this is a futurist approach to understanding the book, and causes problems similar to those found in the premillennial view. For example, if sub-dermal chips are how the mark of the beast is given to mankind, *how do you prove it?* If one claims that some world leader is the Antichrist, *how do you prove it?* Claiming self-evidence is a cop-out that has shown time and again that men have been wrong in their understanding. Hitler, Mussolini, JFK, and others were all touted by ranting preachers to be the Antichrist, proof that the Great Tribulation predicted by Jesus had come. Such a method requires no proof, merely a wait-and-see-if-it-happens attitude.

Amillennialism – “It’s already fulfilled.”

Thanks to the heavy influence of Schofield, Darby, and other scholars, this method almost became extinct. Amillennialism has seen a renewed acceptance, however. Sometimes erroneously called *preterism*, this perspective now makes up the second most widely-accepted view. There are several flavors of preterism, including full-, partial-,

etc. Under this approach (depending on the flavor), Revelation has been more or less fulfilled. This view does not enjoy popularity for a number of reasons:

- It's not as exciting as Premillennialism.
- It shatters 90% of what is taught in today's church, which preachers claim is evidence enough to discount its legitimacy.
- To say that the book has already been fulfilled is annoying to most people. They want to read about future cataclysmic events, and authors churn out hundreds of books to satisfy that curiosity.

To be clear, this study takes the amillennial approach to understanding Revelation.

Idealism – “I have a gut feeling.”

The fourth method of interpretation focuses on passionate issues. The 18th and 19th Century commentators were dogmatic proponents that claimed Revelation described the Roman Catholic Church. The pope is seen as the Antichrist, the Great Harlot is the Catholic Church, and so forth. However, a broad paintbrush is evident in their works. John Darby's one-page dissertation of Revelation's 11th chapter is tellingly anemic. Likewise, Adam Clarke skips over a lot of acreage, preferring to target the symbolism he best understood as being related to the Latin Church. In an age of tolerance, this view has very little support today. Furthermore, since the Catholic Church has existed for over 1,500 years, there are other problems with this approach that the anti-papists have yet to reconcile.

White Supremacists also use idealism to support an interpretation of Revelation fitting their doctrines. To his credit, commentator Adam Clarke wrote, “I must once more say that I do not understand these prophecies. Therefore I do not take upon me to explain them. I see with regret how many learned men have mistaken their way here.”¹ Modern-day “scholars” would do well to assume the same humility.

¹ Clarke's Commentary (Matthew – Revelation) p. 1005