

AN INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION

PART 1: EXAMINING THE METHODS OF INTERPRETATION

Though the interpretations of Revelation are about as numerous as the interpreters, most interpretations fall under one of four categories:

- Futurist
- Historical
- Spiritual
- Preterist

THE FUTURIST METHOD

- Those who take this method interpret everything in the book of Revelation as not yet fulfilled, and therefore all still in the future.
- Premillennialists are the most well-known within this method of interpretation, though there are other groups which assign the entire book to a time yet in the future.
- They call themselves "literalists," trying to make the book of Revelation (which is spoken in symbols) to be literal.
- This method contradicts the following passages within Revelation:
 - Revelation 1:1 – The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants **things which must shortly come to pass**; and he sent and **signified it** by his angel unto his servant John:
 - 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 22:6 – And he said unto me, These sayings *are* faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants **the things which must shortly be done.**
 - Revelation 22:10 – And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: **for the time is at hand.**
- This method makes the book meaningless for everyone except for the final generation on earth.

Extra Notes on the Futurist Method:

THE HISTORICAL METHOD

- This is also called the "continuous-historical method" or the "historicist method."
- Those who take this method interpret the book as giving an inspired history of the church from the first century to the second coming of Jesus Christ.
 - Specifically, though, they view it as a history of the Roman Catholic Church, specific popes, the Protestant Reformation, and events afterward.
 - This method was popular during the Protestant Reformation, and was held by Matthew Henry, John Calvin, Martin Luther, and others.
- This method is also that which is taken by the Gospel Advocate commentary on Revelation.
 - This commentary sees the work of Alexander Campbell specifically mentioned in Revelation.
- This method, instead of applying it to things "shortly come to pass" (Revelation 1:1) applies the majority of the book to a time in the distant future (from the standpoint of the first century readers), making the book impossible for the original readers to interpret.
- This method assumes that God would comfort Christians who were undergoing persecution by foretelling the apostasy of the church and giving an inspired history of the biggest denomination.

Extra Notes on the Historical Method

THE SPIRITUAL METHOD

- This is also called the "allegorical method," the "idealist method," or the "symbolic method."
- Those who take this method make everything in Revelation refer to spiritual principles instead of any actual events.
 - The Catholics, in general, view most of Revelation as an allegory representing the Mass.
 - There are those in the church who take this view, and state that Revelation is a series of seven visions, all of which show the ongoing battle between good and evil, but has no direct application to any specific events.
- This method contradicts the following passages from Revelation:

- Revelation 1:1 - The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants ***things which must shortly come to pass***; and he sent and signified *it* by his angel unto his servant John:
 - God's word says Revelation was written about specific events.
- 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***.
 - It is called a "prophecy," which usually refers to a foretelling of future events.
- Also Revelation 22:6, 10.

Extra Notes on the Spiritual Method:

THE PRETERIST METHOD

- A variation of this view is called the "historical background method," by those who wish to distance themselves from the term "preterist," though they are pretty much the same.
- Those who take this method view the book of Revelation as dealing with events that were imminent when John wrote the book, and that the events in the book have been fulfilled.
 - There are those who are full-preterists, believing the entire book has been fulfilled (Foy E. Wallace's commentary reflects this view).
 - There are those who are partial-preterists, believing all of the book—EXCEPT for chapters 20-22—have already been fulfilled.
 - Most preachers and teachers within the Lord's church take the partial-preterist view.
- There are two main views within the preterist method:
 - That the book was written describing the destruction of Jerusalem and Judaism, which was the biggest persecutor of the church through AD 70.
 - That the book was written describing the downfall of the Roman Empire, which was the biggest persecutor of the church after the downfall of Jerusalem.
- This view is in harmony with the statements of John that the events were "at hand" and "shortly come to pass."

- Objections to this method:
 - "It denies the second coming of Christ and the final judgment."
 - Though some extremists take that view, most do not.
 - The only thing the full preterist view denies is that the second coming is addressed in Revelation.
 - The partial-preterist view takes Revelation 20-21 as describing the second coming, judgment, and eternity in heaven.
 - "It says we are presently living in heaven."
 - Though some extremists take that view, most do not.
 - There are other passages that let us know heaven is not here on earth, so it is impossible for us to be living in heaven now (though our citizenship is there).
 - "This makes the book have no meaning today."
 - This is the most popular objection to this method.
 - This is only true if there is nothing to learn from the book.
 - Using the same logic, we could say that the Old Testament has no meaning today (which is also false).

Extra Notes on the Preterist Method:

Questions:

1. Are there those who take a hybrid view (utilizing more than one method in interpreting the book) of Revelation? _____
2. Does everyone who uses a certain method agree on all the details and specifics within the book? _____
3. Can a method which makes the book meaningless to the original readers be correct? (see the blessing in 1:3) _____
4. Can a method which contradicts the opening statements (1:1, 3) and the closing statements (22:6, 10) of Revelation be correct? _____