

Chapter Five

Seven Views of Revelation

As mentioned in my introduction, the countless interpretations of the various visions found in the writings of John of Patmos can all be arranged into seven basic perspectives from which the various interpretations of the Book of Revelation spring forth. The following is a brief summary of each of the different views that the eschatology pundits have proposed:

The Idealist Viewpoint

Basic Premise: The Book of Revelation is a non-historical and non-prophetic drama about spiritual realities. This method of interpretation has its origins among the ancient theologians of Alexandria, who spiritualised and allegorised much of the Bible to the extent that the many historical events were not treated literally at all but as symbolic stories from which we may learn.

The Historicist Viewpoint

Basic Premise: The Book of Revelation is a prophetic picture of the church history from the time of its writing to the end of the age. Historicists believe the events in Revelation are symbolic of historical events throughout the church age and they usually interpret Mystery Babylon and the Beast as being the apostate church with the Papacy as the Antichrist. Many also interpret the letters to the seven churches as descriptive of seven eras of church history.

The Preterist Viewpoint

Basic Premise: The Book of Revelation is primarily prophetic of the imminent events that were to happen in 70AD with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, though some accept the last chapters as pertaining to the end of the age. With both Full and Partial Preterists there is some dispute, with Full Preterists insisting Revelation 19 was only spiritual and also occurred in 70AD. They typically interpret the millennium as being a symbolic number only and that it represents the church age.

The Futurist Viewpoint

Basic Premise: The Book of Revelation is primarily prophecy about the final days leading to the end of the world. Apart from those who hold a historical view of the letters to the seven churches, the Futurists believe the prophecies of Revelation are yet to come. They generally believe in a literal thousand year reign of Jesus Christ who will return to rule in His physical resurrected body from Jerusalem. They also **believe in a rapture of believers before a seven year tribulation that comes before Jesus' millennial rule**, though some believe the rapture is after that tribulation or in the midst of it. Thus we have Pre-tribulation, Mid-tribulation and Post-tribulation end-time theorists among those who hold to the Futurist point of view.

The Literalist Viewpoint

Basic Premise: The Book of Revelation is fully prophetic and is to be taken literally all the way through, even those portions that seem clearly symbolic. It is somewhat similar to the Futurist viewpoint, but attempts to overcome the vagaries of interpretation by taking the plain meaning to its fullest extent. Often denigrated as being hyper-literal by its detractors.

The Universalist Viewpoint

Basic Premise: All of the above views of the Book of Revelation are legitimate. In the Universalist mindset, there is no contradiction between Idealist, Historicist, Preterist, Futurist, or Literalist. This viewpoint assumes that the Apocalypse has multiple fulfillment of each of its prophecies and can also be taken completely literally whilst still having an allegorical meaning. In this view God has performed a miracle by giving a five in one prophecy. This viewpoint is thought to be the result of a worldly post-modern concept coming into the church expressed in the following phrase: What is true for you is true for you and what is true for me is true for me. In other words, whatever you make of it is okay. Similar to the Idealist viewpoint but all embracing.

The Doctrinalist Viewpoint

Basic Premise: The Book of Revelation can only be understood with a comprehensive understanding of the Gospel AND a thorough appreciation of the destiny of these three kingdoms: the Kingdom of Judah, the Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of God; as detailed in the prophecies of Jesus, the Apostles and the Prophets. The Doctrinalist subjects the Apocalypse and its various interpretations to the scrutiny of that which has already been revealed in plain language from the Word of God and rejects that which cannot be substantiated from the rest of the Bible. The Doctrinalist therefore advocates understanding Revelation from the frame work of all that has been written before it came into being.

The above summary enables one to get a bit of an overview of the diversity of understanding that prevails within the Body of Christ. In the following chapters we will examine some of their **eschatology and or theology, explain a little more about each viewpoint's historical origins, and bring** forth some of the pros and cons of each basic premise. The ultimate goal of this seemingly roundabout route is that we finally come to a biblical understanding.