

Approaches to Interpreting the Book of Revelation

Name	Period of Time	Manner of Fulfillment	Strengths	Weakness
Preterism	past	The events in the book were all fulfilled in the first century. Describes the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 or the fall of Rome in A.D. 476.	Takes seriously the original audience and explains the many passages that emphasize the urgency for the readers to respond quickly, because it would happen in their lifetime.	Can devalue the application of the book because everything has already happened and does not apply to believers living today. Can miss out on the potential benefits of prophecy, and denies the future application of prophecy.
Historicism	present	Describes major events of Christian history spanning from John's time to the Second Coming of Christ. A chronological outline of the course of church history from the first century to the present.	It attempts to apply the message of the seven churches to history.	Can make the entire book irrelevant and deny the historical situation. This view has very few contemporary proponents and artificially forces a grid on all history, leads to endless speculation and subjectivity in its interpretation and is very difficult to arrive at a consensus.
Futurism	future	Describes a future period prior to the Second Coming of Christ. Some would limit the scope to the seven year period of the "Great Tribulation".	Takes seriously the prophetic voice of the OT. Focuses on the critical importance of the second coming, attempts to interpret the scripture literally, and is actively looking for contemporary events that characterize the end.	Can ignore the historical setting, devalue practical application to believers for the last 2000 years, become a cryptic code understood by the elite, make the book unnecessarily difficult for unbelievers and place too much emphasis on current events.
Idealism	timeless	Describes big picture truths and focuses on major themes and principles. Good will eventually prevail over evil. Readers are encouraged to understand a repeated pattern that makes a difference in their current trials, because God wins in the end and perseverance will be rewarded.	Provides practical encouragement and application to believers for every generation, provides practical strategies to defeat our real enemy and offers hope in the midst of very difficult circumstances.	Can place too much emphasis on symbolism, oversimplify complicated concepts and deny the future fulfillment of prophecy.
Eclectic or Hybrid	mixed	This view combines the strengths of Preterism, Futurism and Idealism by anchoring the meaning to the historical situation of the first century, by looking for future fulfillment, and by looking for timeless principles and applying them to our situation.	Takes serious the prophetic voice of the OT, values the historical context of the original audience, appreciates the apocalyptic genre including symbols, focuses on the second coming, provides practical application to believers of all ages and offers hope.	Can be difficult to employ consistent principles of interpretation.