

## FOUR MAJOR INTERPRETATIONS OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION<sup>1</sup>

	PRETERIST	HISTORICIST	IDEALIST/SPIRITUAL	FUTURIST
OTHER NAMES			Allegorical, Spiritual, Poetic, Nonliteral, Symbolic approach	
GENERAL DEFINITION	Addresses events that have already occurred (around end of first century C.E.—covering early church’s struggle against Judaism to fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.) and includes specific counsel regarding Apostle John’s day. <i>Preterist means “past fulfillment.”</i> Specifically a Preterist is a theologian who believes that all the prophecies of the Apocalypse have already been fulfilled.	Predicts in detail the course of human history culminating with the end of the world, the second coming of Christ, and humankind’s eventual entry into the afterlife.	A message for all eras illuminating general principles of the struggle of Christians (the church) and her fight with the "Devil" (evil in the world). Doesn’t match with human history. Imaginative inspiration with overall message: Good struggles against evil and wins in the end.	Concerns the end of time, yet to come. The interpretation is both literal and chronological. Most popular view today by Christians.
WEB SOURCE	<a href="http://www.preteristhomepage.com">www.preteristhomepage.com</a>	<a href="http://www.historicist.com">www.historicist.com</a>		<a href="http://www.endtime.com">www.endtime.com</a>
EARLY ADVOCATES AND TIME PERIOD	Early proponent was Luiz de Alcazar (1554-1613), Jesuit scholar.	Anselm of Havelbery (1129-1155) and Rupert of Deutz (1111-1129). Subsequent adopters include Luther, Sir Isaac Newton, Calvin and Wesley.	3-4 <sup>th</sup> Century, also supposedly initiated by German Theologian Karl Auberlan. William Milligan, 1800s, cited as primary proponent.	Initiated by Francisco Ribera (1537-1591), a Spanish Jesuit, to refute Luther’s criticism of Pope.

<sup>1</sup> All references are from *Revelation Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* edited by Steve Gregg (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1997) unless noted otherwise.  
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PROS	Provides a literal historical view with emphasis on the relevance of the book's message to the era of the author and its original audience.	Prophetic when written and places message of Revelation in context of unfolding history. Many historic points appear to line up well.	Enables Revelation to serve as inspiration for all eras without getting tied up in specific dates and events.	Allows for literal interpretation of symbols and less historical conjecture
CONS (CRITICISMS OF)	Heavy dependence on authorship of Revelation occurring prior to 70 C.E. Viewed as Roman Catholic response to Protestants. Places emphasis on literal interpretation of Matthew 24:34. Provides a "subdued hope for Christians."	Has little to say to the seven churches of Asia, to whom originally addressed. Advocates do not always agree on which historical events are represented by events in the book.	Too liberal, fuzzy interpretation to "what must soon take place" (Rev. 1:1) and, if using this interpretation, the book has little to offer over other scriptures. Plus, leaves door open to many biblically divergent results.	Suspect by Protestants due to Catholic origins. Cannot be tested by history. Would have little impact on early church, since addressed to future occurrences.
SEVEN CHURCHES	Literal letters to the seven churches in Asia based on existing circumstances in each at the time of the writing.	Each represents a period in church history		
SEALS, TRUMPETS, BOWLS	God's judgment against Jerusalem covering the Jewish crisis (66-70 C.E.); i.e., the war with Rome leading to destruction of Jerusalem (Jewish capitol), Jewish state and Jewish religious system.	Foretells secular and political history of the world from John's time to the end of world (the 300 years of Roman conquest, reign of Constantine and Christianity as state religion, the fall of the Western and Eastern Roman empires & the end of time).	Any localize catastrophe (war, earthquake, famine). Recurring times of trouble during which true Christians increase in faith.	Every seal, trumpet and bowl corresponds to an actual historic event (famine, earthquake, etc.) that will occur during the Great Tribulation.
24 THRONES & ELDERS	The Church or the Royal Priesthood or not representational of any group but rather completing the picture of a Heavenly Court	Sanhedrin at Jerusalem or 24 orders of priests or the Church triumphant	12 Patriarchs of Israel and the 12 Disciples of Christ or celestial representatives of all redeemed, glorified and enthroned saints	24 ancestors of Christ (Adam to Pharez) or 24 priestly or Levitical orders or 24 New Testament Saints raptured to Heaven

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FIRST SEAL: RIDER ON WHITE HORSE WITH BOW REVELATION 6:1-2	Rider is Emperor Vespasian or Titus at head of Roman armies or Christ the Messiah warring against his murderers (the Jews). <b>Represents war</b> , the last day of the Jewish state, and the destruction of Jerusalem in 66-70 C.E.			Signals beginning of the Tribulation, Rider on White Horse is Christ or proclamation of gospel in world. Others reject this view as “character of...seals (war, famine, strife) absolutely forbid our thinking of this rider being the Lord Jesus....” Other view as government at hands of Gentiles, symbol of conquest <sup>2</sup> and militarism or Antichrist wearing crown of conquest ( <i>stephanos</i> )
SECOND SEAL: RIDER ON FIERY RED HORSE REVELATION 6:3-4	Second rider represents <b>loss of peace</b> from land of Israel. Romans slaughtered the Jews as well as factions of Jews rose up against each other. <b>Represents violence.</b>			Constant warfare and tension among nations. Color of the horse suggests a bloody time period. Possibly a series of wars (wars and rumors of wars—Matthew 24:6) with the greatest war underway at time of Christ’s second coming. Lindsey identifies red horse and rider as Russia and her Arab allies...attacking Israel. Mid-point of Tribulation culminating in battle of Armageddon.

<sup>2</sup> The rider is the “prince that shall come” as described in Daniel 9:26, who comes after the Anointed One (Messiah). Some (Walvoord) call this rider “the world ruler of the tribulation, same individual described as the beast out of the sea in Revelation 13.”

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THIRD SEAL: RIDER ON BLACK HORSE WITH SCALES REVELATION 6:5-6	One denarius represents a days labor for one man, a quart of wheat represents the food necessary to feed one person; thus no food left for a man to support his family. <b>Represents famine.</b>			Represents famine incurred by war (see second horseman). Also interpreted as economic upheaval (inflation, recession, and panic). Antichrist may use inflation and economic turmoil as justification for imposing strict cost controls (see Revelation 13). <b>Oil &amp; wine</b> interpreted as luxuries available to rich which taunts the impoverished. Also interpreted as staples of life (per Biblical times), which will not be available because it will take a day's labor to buy a day's supply of food for one.
FOURTH SEAL: PALE HORSE WITH DEATH AS RIDER REVELATION 6:7-8	<b>Represents death and pestilence.</b> <sup>3</sup> Hebrew word for "pestilence" commonly translated <b>thanatos</b> (death). Echoes Ezekiel 14:21 with God's "four dreadful judgments" against Jerusalem. Josephus describes the destruction of Jerusalem and "stench of the dead bodies."			One-fourth of population will be killed by the sword, disease and wild beasts. This will be a greater number than killed in Noah's time, thus the term "great tribulation." <sup>4 5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> i.e. "a contagious or infectious epidemic disease that is virulent and devastating."

<sup>4</sup> Also referred to be Jesus in Matthew 24:21 in response to his disciples asking "...what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" For the entire discourse and as a backdrop for interpreting Revelation, see Matthew 24:1-25:46.

<sup>5</sup> Some believe great tribulation lasts 3 ½ years of the tribulation period. Seals may be part of great tribulation, or great tribulation may start Revelation Chapter 11.

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FIFTH SEAL: SOULS OF SLAIN (MARTYRS) UNDER ALTAR REVELATION 6:9-11	Christian martyrs slain by Jewish priests “like animals,” symbolically parallels blood offerings on altar. Souls call for revenge against those who persecuted Christians (Jewish leaders of the nation). Divine destruction of Jerusalem aimed at Jews who murdered the Christ, see parallels with Luke 18:1-8			Souls under altar are martyrs from tribulation period or risen from dead in glory with redeemed bodies. Dispensationalists believe this scene is from time after the Rapture. Debate is on whether these were martyrs from first half, last half or entire tribulation period.
SIXTH SEAL: GREAT DAY OF HIS WRATH, EARTH QUAKES, BLACKENED SUN, BLOOD MOON, STARS FALL, KINGS, SLAVES, RICH & POOR HIDE IN CAVES REVELATION 6:12-17	Represents the great and terrible day of the Lord predicted by Malachi (3:2), John the Baptist, Peter and Paul. Disturbance in heavens signals (symbolically) the end of a temporal empire; i.e. Jewish nation and Jerusalem her capital (see Isaiah 13:10-13, 34:4 and Ezekiel 32:7-8). Josephus tells of Jews fleeing Jerusalem and hiding in caves to avoid slaughter (unsuccessfully) by Romans.			Beginning of last days heralded through cosmic disturbances. Events are viewed by various futurists as all literal, all symbolic or a combination. For instance, earthquake could be interpreted as actual earthquake. <sup>6</sup> or “destruction of the present order—political, social, and ecclesiastical” (Ironsides). Lindsey says the seal represents the first nuclear exchange. <sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Henry Morris explains, “the vast network of unstable earthquake belts around the world ...begin to slip and fracture...and a gigantic earthquake ensues. This is...accompanied by tremendous volcanic eruptions, spewing vast quantities of dust and steam and gasses into the upper atmosphere. It is probably these that will cause the sun to be darkened and the moon to appear blood-red.

<sup>7</sup> Ray Stedman writes, “The sun and moon will appear darkened, probably as a result of dust and ash. This may well be the effect astronomer Carl Sagan has dubbed “nuclear winter,” the darkening of the sun by clouds of dust and ash thrown up by the mass detonation of nuclear weapons.”

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SEALING GOD'S SERVANTS REVELATION 7:1-3	This vision interrupts flow of opening 7 seals to show what happens to the faithful while judgments are rendered on Israel & Jerusalem. Historically, Jewish Christians did escape to safety prior to 70 AD siege. <sup>8</sup> Mark is similar to mark on the faithful in Ezekiel 9:4.			Chapter 6 is chronological while 7 is not. Angels literally control the winds and patrol the four corners (or quarters) of the earth. Saints are sealed and protected from the judgment to come. This interlude contrasts the safety of the faithful to "the panic of the pagan world fleeing judgment" (Mounce)."
144,000 REVELATION 7:4-8	Believed to be a symbolic number representing the Jewish Christians who were spared the siege of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Confirmed in Revelation 14:4 when they are called the "first fruits of God." If this group were of a future time (as the Futurist believe) then they should have been called the "last fruits of God." See James 1:1 and 18.			Interpreted as Jewish Christians involved in evangelism and protected by God (Lindsey) during the tribulation or a godly remnant of Jewish believers (Gaebelein) or symbolic of the church during tribulation--these Futurists (Mounce and Ladd) do not accept theory that the Rapture occurs prior to the tribulation.

<sup>8</sup> Historian Eusebius (ca. 325 C.E.) wrote, "The whole body, however, of the church at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation, given to men of approved piety there before the war, removed from the city, and dwelt at a certain town beyond the Jordan, called Pella." (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book III, Chapter 5)

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GREAT MULTITUDE REVELATION 7:9-17	<p>Two Interpretations: Multitude represents Christian Martyrs who survived the great tribulation (the Jewish War of 66-70 C.E.) but who were not Jewish; i.e., Gentiles. Heavy emphasis on “glorious gains and blessings of faithful martyrdom.”</p> <p>Second, God shows John the great throng of Gentiles saved because He disowned His rebellious wife and children (symbolically, the Jewish nation and her children) and sought a new family (Gentiles). See Hosea 1:10, 2:23, Romans 9:24-28, and 1 Peter 2:9-10.</p>			24 Elders (see 4:4-5) are saints (or the church) caught up in the rapture, whereas the multitude are gentiles brought to Christ during tribulation (they have an inferior status to those saints caught up in the Rapture).
SEVENTH SEAL: SILENCE IN HEAVEN REVELATION 8:1	Silence because the “loud voices” of martyrs have been stilled by the beginning of the judgment on Jerusalem? Or symbolically parallel to the silent prayer required by the priest in the temple when offering daily incense (Luke 1:10)?			The silence in heaven is like the silence before the jury foreman reads the verdict. Seventh seal contains all subsequent developments in 2 <sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ. Silence is a foreboding of judgments to follow.
CORRELATING SCRIPTURES	See Jesus’ predictions on Fall of Jerusalem in Mathew 24 and Luke 21:5-36			

THE BEAST (REV. 13)		The Pápacy of the Roman Church as interpreted by Martin Luther (c. 1500) & other reformers.	Any evil force appearing at any time.	
ANTICHRIST		The Antichrist is not one person, but was fulfilled by the papacy of the Roman Catholic Church. We should not expect an Antichrist in the future.	Any individual who is against (anti) the teachings of Jesus Christ.	Many antichrists have existed throughout the years, but the Bible prophesies one Antichrist who will rule a unified - world government for three and one-half years immediately before the coming of Jesus Christ at Armageddon.
YEAR FOR A DAY PRINCIPLE		Yes		Yes
PROSTITUTE (WHORE) OF BABYLON			The once righteous church, turned away from God.	
TEN-HORNED KINGDOM OR CREATURE	Rome	Ten-horn kingdom existed at the time of the dissolution of the Roman Empire, and the papacy rose up among the ten kings/kingdoms.	Secular influences for evil.	The ten-horn kingdom has not yet appeared on earth. The Antichrist will arise from among these ten kings.
TRIBULATION	Persecution of Christians leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 C.E.	The Great Tribulation lasted 1,260 years and is past. There will be no time of great tribulation at the Second Coming. Covered in Chapters 4-19.	Any period of great trouble and persecution.	The Great Tribulation is in the future and will last three and one-half years (some believe seven years). It will occur during the last half of Daniel's 70th week, and will be terminated when the Antichrist is destroyed by Jesus Christ at Armageddon.

Other interpretations: Dramatic Approach (a grand epic poem or drama like Homer's Iliad or Odyssey—ca. Eichhorn 18<sup>th</sup> Century) and the Literary-Analytical Approach (study sources that influenced John in his writings, plus dissection of each verse—Hugo Grotius 1583-1645).