

Interpreting Revelation ¹

Interpreting Revelation has caused much debate, and at least four standard methods for interpreting the book have developed. **Preterists** view the book as referring almost exclusively to first-century events. **Historicists** view the book as referring to the unfolding of church history until Christ's second coming. **Idealists** see the book as symbolizing the eternal conflict between good and evil. **Futurists** see the book as mainly about the end times. Sometimes interpreters blend two or more of these approaches.

Furthermore, the "thousand years" of 20:2-6 has been the basis of three different views of the *millennium* (the Latin word for "thousand years").

The **amillennial** (no millennium) interpretation sees Christ as ruling spiritually in the church now; Satan has been bound or at least hindered during this present church era. According to this view, there will be no literal thousand-year reign; instead, Christ reigns through the church for an unknown number of years before He returns.

The **postmillennial** (after the millennium) interpretation understands that by the spread of the gospel the world will become progressively more Christian. When the world becomes completely Christian there will be a millennium, then Jesus will return in glory.

The **premillennial** (before the millennium) view holds that Jesus Christ will return to earth to set up His visible kingdom. At that time Satan will be bound for a thousand years.

Those who accept the premillennial position take specific views on when Christ will remove believers from the earth before He returns (19:11-21). A comparison of the common symbolism of Daniel and Revelation, as well as time references in Dan. 7:25; 9:27; 12:7 along with those in Rev. 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5, seem to indicate that a seven-year period (see Dan. 9:24-27), often called the Tribulation, will precede Christ's return. Several different views have tried to explain the timing between the Rapture of the church and the Tribulation. (The word *rapture* comes from the Latin translation of "caught up" in 1

Thess. 4:17.)

Pretribulationists expect the Rapture to take place before seven years of tribulation.

Midtribulationists say the Rapture will occur midway through the seven-year period.

The **posttribulation view** states that the church will go through the Tribulation, but will be removed at the time of Christ's second coming.

The **prewrath view** places the Rapture between the mid- and posttribulational points, before the climactic wrath of God.

Each of these positions depends on a different view of how the text of Revelation should be interpreted. It is a good idea to keep this in mind whenever you try to understand a position or talk about it with others. The central idea on which all these views agree is that Christ will return sometime in the future, and that His return will be a welcome sight to His people. Our hope and prayer is the same as the apostle John's: "Come, Lord Jesus!" (22:20).

¹ "Nelson's NKJV Study Bible", p. 2195