

Review and Additional Notes

What is the Book of Revelation?

The Book of Revelation is a series of apocalyptic visions that utilizes symbols and numbers to make prophetic announcements concerning the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God has come and is now in the process of being consummated or completed. Revelation is written to the church as a congregational letter from God in Christ through an angel to John, a servant for the church.

When interpreting this book or any Scripture, we consider the specific historical context in which it was written, as well as the overall biblical context. The timing of the fulfillment of prophecies in Revelation has long been debated. There are four primary interpretations regarding the timing of the events being described.

- Preterist – The prophecies were fulfilled within the first few centuries of Christianity.
- Historicist – The prophecies have been and are being fulfilled in the course of history, particularly Western Christian history.
- Futurist – They are largely unfulfilled and everything in chapters 4-22 are still awaiting fulfillment in the future.
- Idealist – The prophecies are fulfilled symbolically throughout the history of the church.

All of these views have certain strengths and weaknesses. Preterist views help us understand the relevance to those who were the first recipients of the letter. It explains best the comfort offered to the first and second century church. But it ignores the cosmic battle that is still taking place even after the fall of Rome in the 6th century. The historicist view understands rightly that everything is unfolding throughout the course of history, but by placing a heavy emphasis on trying to match current events in Western civilization with the prophecies of Revelation, the historicist views virtually ignores any meaning or significance that this letter had for the first century church. The same weakness is found in the futurist view. The idealist view helps us make application for the book of Revelation relevant in every generation of the church, but it misses the literalness of the Second Coming of Christ and the literal reality of a kingdom that is to come. So which view is best?

The church has been waiting and debating for 2000 years just to hear my definitive opinion on this matter. The answer is...YES. We will seek to understand the book of Revelation the way we understand all of Scripture. We know that the words had meaning for the first readers in their context, but that the words were also given under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for the benefit of generations of Christians to come. It is possible to read and understand Revelation while avoiding the weaknesses of the various approaches to interpretation. We can understand that there is an immediate fulfillment of the prophetic announcements that point us to a future fulfillment of those same announcements.