

PRETERIST METHOD OF INTERPRETATION

The prefix, "preter" is from the Latin, "praeter" which means past. Therefore the word, "preterist" refers to someone who views the apocalyptic events in Revelation 4 to 19 as having taken place in the past.

Preterists believe that the fulfillment of most, if not all, of Revelation's prophecies relate to the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 when the Roman General Titus decimated the city of Jerusalem and killed most of its more than two million inhabitants.

Note: Some preterists believe that the period of prophetic fulfillment envisioned in Revelation extends beyond the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD - all the way to the destruction of the Roman Empire in the fifth century AD, but the majority of preterists hold to the earlier date.

For preterists, the language of Revelation 1:1, **"things which must shortly take place"** is crucial - and establishes a time frame for the entire book.

Preterists insist that expressions like **"things which must shortly take place"** (in v 1) - and **"the time is near"** (in v 3) speak of the SPEED of fulfillment - whereas others interpret those expressions as referring to the CERTAINTY of fulfillment

They believe that Revelation was a disclosure of events that were imminent at the time of the book's writing - and that all of those events transpired

Preterists assert that the visionary material contained in 4:1 to 22:5 has many connections to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3.

For instance, references to **"those who say they are Jews and are not"** (2:9 and 3:9) are connected with the vision of the true Jews in 7:1-8. Satan's throne in 2:13 relates to the Dragon in 12:9. Martyrdom in 2:10,13 links up with martyrdom in 6:9; 11:7; 13:15; 17:6; and 20:4. The promise of the tree of life in 2:7 is connected to the tree of life in 22:2. Jezebel in 2:20-22 ties in with the Prostitute of chapter 17, etc.

Therefore Preterists assert that through these and other connections, it's clear that the entire book of Revelation, not just chapters 2 and 3, address the problems and struggles of the seven churches in the first century.

According to preterists, only chapters 21-22 which contain the vision of the new heaven and earth, do we find a prophecy of events still awaiting future fulfillment - but all others were fulfilled in the first century.

A preterist proponent, W. G. Kummel wrote, "[The Apocalypse is a book of its time, written...for its time, not for the distant generations of the future or even of the end-time.](#)"

Strength of Preterist Method of Interpretation

It recognizes that Revelation speaks of events that "must soon take place," not events in a distant future, far removed from the circumstance of the early church.

Preterism properly focuses on the relevance of the book's teaching to its first recipients, the church of the first century.

Weakness of Preterist Method of Interpretation

A weakness of this method is the danger of limiting the application of the message of the book of Revelation only to the churches in John's day.

The problem with a consistently preterist reading of Revelation is that the book tends to become largely irrelevant to the present struggles of the church today.

FUTURIST METHOD OF INTERPRETATION

The futurist approach to the book of Revelation regards the visions of chapters 4–22 as referring to events that lie in the future - events that will occur immediately prior to Christ's second coming and the end of history.

Therefore futurists view the book as a volume of unfulfilled prophecy.

Furthermore they maintain that the events from chapters 4 to 19 will take place within the brief space of 7 years during a period of great tribulation.

This time is interpreted to be the seventieth week mentioned in Daniel 9:24-27 which they regard to be separated by many centuries (at least twenty) from the other sixty-nine weeks and which will occur at the close of the Christian church era.

This great tribulation is believed to occur subsequent to the rapture and removal of the church from the earth during which God's program for national Israel allegedly resumes.

Futurists tend to interpret most of the events in the visions of Revelation literally versus symbolically which leads them to attempt to interpret the apocalyptic visions by identifying them as specific historical events or individuals (similarly to the historicist method of interpretation).

Futurists anticipate an earthly, millennial, political reign of Christ on earth following His return and defeat of the beast (Revelation 20:1-10), which will be followed by the last judgment and the eternal state.

Strength of Futurist Method of Interpretation

1. The strength of futurism is its recognition that the book of Revelation teaches continued, and even increased, suffering for the people of God before the end of history.
2. Futurism also properly emphasizes that the ultimate triumph of Christ and His people will occur only at the second coming of Christ and exhorts Christians to look forward and fix their hope on the second coming of Christ as the climatic event in God's victory over Satan.

Weakness of the Futurist Method of Interpretation

1. Most futurists are literalists in their interpretation of Revelation and they see very little that is symbolical in the book. Futurists also believe that numbers in the book of Revelation represent actual mathematical values and aren't to be understood as symbolic representations.

Futurists claim that their system of interpretation excels because of their emphasis upon literalism. Although this may sound noble, the Bible is written in different styles and literary forms. Therefore the method of interpretation must be consistent with the respective style or form.

As we've previously considered, God has packaged His Word for us in many different ways (historical narrative, poetry, parables, etc) and it must therefore be interpreted in a way that is consistent with its method of presentation and with God's intent.

Therefore to interpret a parable literally or to interpret poetry as history is a false procedure. Similarly, when God presents or reveals something in highly figurative and symbolical language (such as the book of Revelation), then to impose a literal method of interpretation upon it perverts, rather than promotes, its true meaning.

2. The weakness of the futurist approach is that it views the bulk of the book of Revelation as describing events in a distant future.

Consequently, much of the book interpreted this way would've had little direct relevance for those persecuted believers for whom the book was originally written and addressed.

HISTORICIST METHOD OF INTERPRETATION

Historicists believe that the visions and prophecies contained in Revelation constitute a chronological sequence and forecast of the course of church history from the first century (6:1) until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (19:11).

Consequently its proponents attempt to identify significant symbols in Revelation (seals, trumpets, the beast, Babylon, etc) with specific events, dates, institutions, movements and people.

Historicists compare the symbols of Revelation with the course of history in a detailed and exacting manner. They view Revelation as being an inspired forecast of the whole of human history whose symbols describe significant events that will precede the second coming of Jesus Christ

However not only are their guesses highly speculative at who and what the symbols of Revelation represent, but they also have no relevance or application to the people and churches to whom the book was written.

There are also many renowned bible commentators such as Albert Barnes (author of Barnes Notes) who were historicists as is evident from the outline copied below in his Notes on the Book of Revelation:

Strength of Historicist Method of Interpretation

- 1. The strength of historicism lies in its recognition that the visions of Revelation do refer to events that were occurring at the time of its original writing and also would occur throughout the history of the church until Christ's second coming.**
- 2. To its credit, this view interprets the book of Revelation symbolically and anticipates the ultimate overthrow of evil.**

Weakness of Historicist Method of Interpretation

- 1. Understood from the historicist viewpoint, the book of Revelation is entirely irrelevant and out of touch with the circumstances of the first century Christians to whom it was originally written.**

Basic hermeneutical principle: Any interpretation should be regarded as erroneous if it wouldn't have been relevant for its recipients.

Ray Summers, *Worthy is the Lamb*

"Nothing could have been more useless in comforting and helping the persecuted Christians of John's day than a treatise on the apostasy of a church system which was several hundred years off in its origin. They could not have understood it, and it would not have relieved their suffering if they had."

- 2. Another weakness of the historicist viewpoint is that it attributes too much emphasis to the apostasy of the Roman Catholic Church.**

The horizon of this method is too narrow. In the historicist method, the events contained in the book of Revelation are, in effect, confined to the countries where Roman Catholicism has held sway.

Therefore the historicist method of interpreting Revelation restricts its application to predominantly Roman Catholic countries, but has little or no meaning for people in countries where Romanism is relatively unknown.