

1. **Introduction:** The study of Revelation falls under the general topic of eschatology (the study of last things).
  - Jesus said, no one except the Father knows the time of His return. That truth has not stopped people from being confident with predictions of the day He will return.
  - Since the resurrection, hundreds of wrong predictions have been made for the day Christ will return.
  - Revelation has been subject to a great variety of different interpretations. Today we will briefly survey 4 major categories of interpretation. Different interpretations assume not only different sequencing of end-time events (what comes first, etc.) but also, different numbers and types of pre-return events
  - Examples of interpretation issues: (1.) Does Christ return before or after the 1000-year reign? (2.) When does the 1000-year reign begin? (3.) Will there be a “rapture” before the second coming of Christ? (4.) Will there be one or two resurrections of the dead? (5.) What does Jesus’ Olivet Discourse say about Temple destruction and end times?
2. **Positions:** There are 4 common interpretations based on position concerning the millennial or 1000-year reign of Christ (discussed in Revelation 20).
3. **(1.) Historic Premillennialism (Premil):** Before Christ returns the world will be evangelized, the great tribulation will occur, and Antichrist will come.
  - Premils believe the present church age will continue until the time of Great Tribulation and ends when the tribulation ends. Christ will then return to establish a literal earthly millennial kingdom. Satan will be bound. Believers who have died will be resurrected.
  - Resurrected believers and those still alive will receive glorified resurrection bodies and reign with Christ on earth for the 1000 years. Many unbelievers remaining on earth will believe in Christ and be saved.
  - At the end of the millennium, Satan will be released to lead a final rebellion among the many unbelievers who remain unconverted.
  - Satan will be decisively defeated. A second resurrection will occur in which the unbelieving dead will be raised for final judgment before the eternal state.
4. **(2.) Dispensational Premillennialism (Dispen Premil):** A relatively modern view from the late 1800s, its origin is often connected with John Nelson Darby (1800-1882).
  - Compared to other views, this view interprets prophecy literally and chronologically.
  - A central tenet of dispensational premillennialism is Christ will return in two stages.
  - First in the rapture, where believers are taken to heaven. Then a seven-year tribulation in which the Anti-Christ will, through deception, set up a false kingdom. The Temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt and sacrifices re-established.

- After the tribulation, Christ will again return to forcibly overthrow the Anti-Christ and to reign physically on earth for 1000 years.
  - Satan will be released at the end of the literal 1000 years and cause a rebellion which Christ will defeat. There will be a final judgment for believers and unbelievers.
  - Dispensational premillennialism emphasizes distinctions between Israel and the Church, viewing them as two separate entities with distinct destinies.
5. (3.) **Amillennialism (Amil)**: Amils consider Christ's Second Coming to be a single event, rather than occurring in two phases. "Amil" implies "no millennium," but that is not what is believed. Amils do believe in a millennium but of a different conception.
- For Amils, the binding of Satan (Revelation 20) for a thousand years coincides with the present rule of Christ through the church. Both began at the death and resurrection of Jesus (John 12:31-33) and continues until the Parousia (second Coming).
  - The millennium is thus the Spiritual reign of Christ and his saints. The number 1000 is symbolic. It represents a long and complete time ( $1000 = 10 \times 10 \times 10$ ).
  - Some believe the millennial reign refers only to the deceased saints in heaven. Others believe that through the Church, the reign is also earthly in a spiritual sense.
  - Amil believes Satan was bound by Christ's victory in the Cross and Resurrection. The binding means the Gospel will be unhindered by Satan deceiving the nations.
  - Satan will continue to have significant but limited influence. Amil believes Satan's "binding" to be specifically – *"that he might not deceive the nations"* (Rev. 20:3).
  - Amils tend to conceptualize the Kingdom as primarily spiritual in nature until the end when Christ returns and inaugurates a physical reign.
  - The end appears to occur 7 times in Revelation, indicating the book is not meant to be read as a straightforward chronology. It is a progressive parallelism with each cycle retelling aspects of the history of redemption and moving closer to the End.
  - Amils usually take a symbolic approach to interpreting the book of Revelation and see it as 7 cycles of recapitulation rather than straight line chronology.
  - Amils believe the First Resurrection alludes to a person's regeneration in which they are resurrected from spiritual death to spiritual life and become a Christian. Converted people reign presently with Christ (cf. Eph 2:1-7; Col 3:1-4).
  - Amils believe, throughout history the gospel goes through both good and bad times.
  - Most Amils believe in a final apostasy and increasing persecution near the End.
  - Amils believe there are "already/not yet" truths in God's plan. The kingdom began with Christ, who now reigns from heaven, but its full realization is yet to come.
  - Many OT promises to Israel are spiritually fulfilled in Christ and the Church. As the true Israel of God, the church fulfills promises made to Israel (Rm 4:1-16; Gal 6:16).

6. **(4.) Postmillennialism (Postmil):** Postmils believe Christ's return will be after the millennium. Postmil and Amil share many beliefs. Amils consider that the Church will experience both victories and suffering until the second coming.
- Amillennialists were known as Postmillennialists until the 1900s. The two differ from Premil in agreeing Christ's Final Coming brings only one physical resurrection (both righteous and wicked). Then the final judgment and the new heavens and new earth.
  - Both agree God's promises to OT Israel are fulfilled through Christ and the Church (indeed, all the promises of God find their yes and Amen in Christ – 2 Cor. 1:20).
  - Thus, national Israel does not feature as prominently in these systems, although both affirm that God will save many Jewish people through the expanse of the Gospel.
  - Both agree that the 1000-year Millennium of Revelation 20 is a figurative period where the Gospel is preached throughout the world because Satan is bound. According to this view, believers will gradually increase until a majority of the world becomes Christian.
  - Not all will be regenerated and saved, but the influence of the Gospel will be pervasive. On the Last Day, Christ will return, believers and unbelievers will all be raised. Final Judgment, new heavens and earth, and the entrance into the eternal state will occur.
  - The Bible repeatedly affirms Christ shall reign until He has put every enemy under His feet. The last enemy to be defeated before the end is death itself (Ps 110:1; 1 Cor 15:25-26; etc.). For that reason, Postmil does not stress an "any moment" return of Christ.
7. **Eschatological Prophecy** : Five common ways of understanding Bible prophecies related to the Last Days are Futurist, Idealist, Historicist, Preterist, and Eclectic.
8. **Futurist:** Futurist considers most prophecies in Revelation concerning the Last Days and those of Jesus' Olivet Discourse as being in the future to us.
- This view expects things to get worse as the fulfillment gets closer. Many Premils, Dispen Mils and Amils hold to some form of Futurism.
9. **(2.) Idealist:** Also called the Spiritual view. Idealist accepts an allegorical representation of the types of things or events in Revelation that believers may expect in the time between the inauguration of Christ's kingdom and its consummation.
- Idealist doesn't see the events in Revelation as tied to any one specific event in history.
  - It focuses on principles and ideas of the cosmic spiritual conflict of our war with Satan which will repeat in various forms until the Second Coming.
  - It focuses on patterns repeated throughout the world and history. It is distinct from the other views in that it does not see any of the prophecies (except the Second Coming, and Final Judgment) as ever being fulfilled in a literal, physical, earthly sense.
  - This view is predominantly held by Amils, although not all Amils are Idealists.

10. **(3.) Historicist:** Revelation is considered a kind of template for history. Historicism is concerned with tracking the church's development over the centuries and attempting to align historical events with what is described in Revelation. That has turned out to be an extremely tricky task.
11. **(4.) Partial Preterist:** Preter, in Latin, means "past." "Partial Preterist" is a historic, orthodox position that assumes many Biblical prophecies have been fulfilled but not all.
- "Hyper Preterist" assumes all prophecies have been fulfilled and denies a future physical Final Coming of Christ. It is recognized as heresy by Evangelical Christians.
  - Partial Preterist believes predictions made about the Temple's destruction in Jesus's Olivet Discourse (a few days before His Crucifixion) were fulfilled in events leading up to the Temple's destruction in 70 AD which signaled the end of the "Old Covenant" age.
  - Jesus made the predictions saying, "this generation" (meaning His contemporaries) will not pass away before all this takes place. A generation was considered 40 years.
  - Early Christian writers used the 70 AD fulfillment of events predicted in the Olivet discourse to verify the truth of Jesus's Olivet prophecies.
  - Partial Preterist believes many NT references to the Last Days refer to the tribulation that occurred during the time between when Roman Legions surrounded Jerusalem, permitting no one to leave and no food to go into the city and the fall of Jerusalem and destruction the Temple. Jesus' return at the end is still future.
  - Much of Revelation concerns the time of the siege and fall of Jerusalem. John writes as a "partner in the present tribulation" (Rev. 1:9). He wrote about what was "soon to take place" (v. 1). The time markers he gives about the Last Days are "soon," "shortly," and "quickly." Jesus is "at the gate" and "near."
  - Partial Preterist is often held by Postmils and less often by some Amils.
12. **Timing of Critical Events:** Jesus' crucifixion – 33 AD. Destruction of Temple ending the Old Covenant age – 70 AD. These two are separated by less than a generation..
- Finding the correct interpretation of Revelation depends heavily on knowing the correct date of its writing. Was it before or after the fall of Jerusalem?
13. **Next:** The date of writing.