

- PART 1. THE PRETERIT VIEW
- PART 2. THE HISTORICIST VIEW
- PART 3. THE FUTURIST VIEW (PREMILLENNIALISM)
- PART 4. THE HISTORICIST-FUTURIST VIEW (DISPENSATIONALISM)
- PART 5. THE SYMBOLIC IMAGINARY VIEW
- PART 6. EVALUATION OF THE TRADITIONAL VIEWS
- PART 7. THE SYMBOLIC LITERAL VIEW (INAUGURATED OR REALISED MILLENNIALISM)

Throughout the Bible, God has proclaimed *his coming* for the salvation of his people and for the judgement of the others (Matthew 13:41-42; Jude 1:14-16). Even the theme of the book of Revelation is “the Lord is coming!” (unto salvation and judgement)(1:7; 22:12,20). His coming, however, is interpreted differently.

The main differences in the interpretation of the book of Revelation have to do with the questions:

- a. Is the book a linear chronological account of events or not?
- b. Does the book deal with mainly future events or not?
- c. Should the book be interpreted in terms of literal identifiable historical events, persons and time-periods or not?

There are six different approaches to interpreting the book of Revelation.

- a. The first four approaches favour the linear-chronological approach:
the preterit view, the historicist view, the futurist view and the historicist-futurist view.
- b. And the last two approaches favour the symbolic approach:
the symbolic imaginary (idealist) view and the symbolic literal (realist) view.

This commentary follows the symbolical literal (realist) view, also called inaugurated or realised millennialism.

The characteristics of the linear chronological approaches are:

- a. History is linear chronological. These approaches agree that the book of Revelation is a linear chronological account of events and maintain that the visions in the book are meant to be kept end to end.
- b. People, events and time periods are demonstrable or identifiable literal. These approaches agree that the visions and symbols in the book of Revelation represent literal people, events and time periods, which must necessarily be literally demonstrable or identifiable.
- c. The contents are only past history or mainly future predictions. These approaches agree that the first three chapters deal mainly with past and/or present events, but they differ among one another how the remainder of the book, that is, the greatest part of the book, should be interpreted: The book of Revelation is viewed either only as a history of the past or mainly as a prophecy of the future. The book should be read as “a presentation of only past events” (preterit) or as “a prediction of mainly future events” (historicist and futurist).

The characteristics of the symbolic approaches are:

- a. History is non-linear chronological. These approaches agree that the book is not a linear chronological account of events. There is another way of dividing the contents of the book. The visions in the book are *not* meant to be kept end to end.
- b. People, events and time periods are symbolic imaginary or literal. These approaches agree that the contents of the book cannot be fitted into some definable era of history and that the contents do not refer to specific known persons, events and time-periods. No-one can identify the end-time events in a way as to predict its arrival (Matthew 24:36; 1 Thessalonians 5:2)! The people and events are described in symbolic terms and refer to types of people and trends within history.

However these approaches disagree about whether these symbolic persons, events and time periods are purely imaginary or hypothetical (idealist view) or whether they are literally historical (realist view). The visions consisting of symbols and numbers represent historical types of persons, historical trends and historical periods, which are not specific (idealist view) or which are literally real people, real events and real periods of time (realist view), even when they are not necessarily literally demonstrable or identifiable.

c. The contents are only hypothetical types and trends or real history and predictive prophecy. These approaches agree that the book of Revelation deals with the past, the present and the future and that the book has relevance for Christians of every age. They disagree about whether the book contains predictive prophecy or not, even if the emphasis of the book is not on the prediction of demonstrable or identifiable future events, but on revealing God’s plan for the past, present and future history.

PART 1. THE PRETERIT VIEW

This view has only a past (the contemporary events of John), but no future. Preterit is a grammatical term denoting past action or state. The preterit view is against predictive prophecy.

PAST	John	SC=second coming ↓
1 st century Rev 1 – 22		X today

a. The preterit view

The preterit view regards the book of Revelation as a symbolic presentation or evaluation of past events under the guise of prophecy. The visions arise out of the literal conditions of the Roman Empire in the first century A.D. The book depicts only past historical events and no future historical events.

The seer (John) was appalled at the possibilities for evil inherent in the Roman Empire and he used symbolic imagery to protest against it, and to record his conviction that God would intervene to bring about what pleased him. In general, so-called liberal scholars endorse this view, because it enables them to understand the book of Revelation without finding much place for predictive prophecy, and at the same time to see in the book a much-needed assertion of the truth of God’s moral government of the world.

b. Contribution of the preterit view

The preterit view stresses the historical background of the book. The historical background of the book of Revelation is certainly needed to interpret the book. There can be no doubt that the book is rooted in the concrete historical situation, the circumstances of the writer’s own day. The island of Patmos, the seven historical churches, the commerce-corruption-power of Rome, “the kings of the east” beyond the mysterious border of the Euphrates, the use of a seal to enforce economic sanctions, governmental insistence on united worship of the head of state (emperor), were all common in the days of Caesar Domitian.

c. Limitation of the preterit view

The preterit view overlooks the fact that the book calls itself an apocalypse and a prophecy (1:1; 1:3; 22:18) and thus that some of its predictions must refer to what is still future (e.g. Revelation 21-22). The book cannot be limited to only contemporary events of the writer. By limiting the contents of the book of Revelation to only past events during the time of John, virtually causes the book of Revelation to have no significance for the succeeding centuries!

PART 2. THE HISTORICIST VIEW

This view has a past, a present and a future without a historical gap.
 A historicist is a person who maintains the historical genuineness of alleged events.

PAST		PRESENT	FUTURE
John			SC=second coming ↓
1 st century Rev 1 - 3 7 lampstands	2 nd century	Rev 4 - 22 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 bowls, etc	X today

a. The historicist view

The historicist view regards the book of Revelation as a symbolic presentation of literal identifiable future events, which are linked together to form a continuous story of the history between the first century A.D. to the end of time. The book depicts past, present and future historical events without a gap in history.

The historicist view discovers copious and detailed references of historical persons and events in history from the 1st century until today. For example, the seven trumpets cover the period from A.D. 395 to A.D. 1453, beginning with the attacks of the Goths on the Western Roman Empire and concluding with the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire to the Turks. The 1st trumpet was the invasion of the Goths under Alaric, who sacked Rome. The 2nd trumpet was the invasion under Genseric, who conquered North Africa. The 3rd trumpet was the raid of the Huns under Attila, who devastated Central Europe. The 4th trumpet was the collapse of the Roman Empire under the conquest of Odoacer. The locusts of the 5th trumpet were the Muslim hordes that poured into the west between the 6th and 8th centuries. The 6th trumpet concerning four evil angels bound at the Euphrates, was the growth of the Turkish power.

Many of the Reformers identified papal Rome with the beast. Later historicists found references to Napoleon, wars in the Balkans, the great European war of 1914-1918, the German ex-emperor Wilhelm, Hitler and Mussolini. etc.

b. Contribution of the historicist view

The historicist view stresses and appreciates the continuity of the hand of God in the history of the world and the Church. The book of Revelation is not just a snapshot of one short period of time, whether a short period in the past (preterit) or a short period in the future (futurist)! The book of Revelation is a message throughout the history of the world!

c. Limitation of the historicist view

The historicist view makes far-fetched identifications of symbols with identifiable historical events and there is much disagreement among historicists about the identification of the symbols.

The advocates of this view are constantly confronted with the dilemma of a far-fetched spiritualisation in order to maintain the chain of historical events. They are forced to make arbitrary identification of symbols with definite concrete historical events. They moreover tend to put more details into their interpretation than the text would warrant. Finally, it is also difficult to see why the outline of world history should confine itself to Western Europe, especially since in the earlier days at least much of the expansion of Christianity was in the Eastern lands.

PART 3. THE FUTURIST VIEW (PREMILLENNIALISM)

This view has a past, a present and a future with a large historical gap.

A futurist is a person who believes that the prophecies in the book of Revelation are still to be fulfilled in *our* future.

PAST		PRESENT		PROPHETIC GAP IN HISTORY		FUTURE	
John				1 st return		2 nd return	
				↓		↓	
1 st century		CHURCH AGE	X today	GREAT TRIBULATION	MILLENNIUM	NEW EARTH	
Rev 1 – 3				ISRAEL	ISRAEL	ISRAEL	
				Rev 4 – 19	Rev 20	Rev 21 - 22	

a. The futurist view

The futurist view regards the book of Revelation as a prophecy, a symbolic prediction of literal identifiable future events, which are still to be fulfilled in the period immediately preceding and following the second return of Jesus. It looks at future historical events as through a telescope. The book depicts mainly future historical events in *our* future after a large historical gap between the 1st century and the end of the Church Age. The futurist view is above all concerned with three issues in this order:

- The strict separation of Israel and the Church
- The interpolation of God’s plan with the New Testament Church in the middle of his plan with Israel
- The literal interpretation of the Bible: a literal linear chronological order of events and a literal millennium

Israel. The futurists view is mainly concerned, not with the Christian Church, but with Jewish Israel. “The book of Revelation is largely Jewish.”¹ It maintains that all unfulfilled prophecies in the Old Testament regarding Israel must and will be literally fulfilled in the future. That can only happen when the Church has been removed from this earth (at the rapture or first return of Jesus). Therefore the book of Revelation is a prophecy and the book should be read as a prophetic chart or timetable of future history, especially the future history of Israel. According to this view the book of Revelation is on the whole not concerned with past history of John’s day (the preterit view), nor with later historical events in the world (the historicist view), nor with the history of the Church (the inaugurated millennial view). By and large, the book of Revelation is concerned only with the literal identifiable future events concerning Israel and the Gentile nations that will take place in our future immediately preceding and following the second return of Jesus.

Daniel and the prophetic gap. Many, if not most, futurists use the book of Daniel in the Old Testament to interpret the book of Revelation in the New Testament. They regard the events between Revelation 4:1 and 19:21 as parallel with the so-called 70th week of Daniel (Daniel 9:24-27). Because Daniel's 69th week is interpreted as the first coming of Christ when he was crucified, futurists must accept that there is a long parenthetic period (prophetic gap) between Daniel’s 69th and 70th week. According to the futurists the whole Church Age or most of what is written in the New Testament happens within this parenthetic period! Thus most of what happens in the book of Revelation happens after the removal of the Church from the earth. The futurists view believes that all the visions from Revelation 4:1 to the end of the book are yet to be fulfilled in the period immediately preceding and following the second return of Christ (also called the apokalupsis or revelation).

[Remarks.

In stead of making the book of Daniel normative for the interpretation of Revelation, as the futurist view does, the whole Old Testament should be interpreted in the far clearer light of the New Testament revelation (2 Corinthians 3:14-16; Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5-13).

While futurists maintain that the Old Testament prophets knew nothing about the Church, the New Testament clearly teaches that the Old Testament prophets knew about the Church and about Gentiles becoming God’s people (Romans 9:25-29; 10:19-20; Acts 13:47; Hebrews 11:10,16,39-40; 1 Peter 1:9-12)!]

¹ Larkin, Revelation p. 3

Literal hermeneutic. The futurist view believes that the contents of the book of Revelation can be fitted into some definable era of history and consequently the contents may be integrated with reference to literal specific known persons, events and time-periods.

[**Remark.** However, no matter how the figures and intervals in the book of Revelation have been pressed and twisted to yield literal results, no clear parallel to the literal past or present history has yet been convincingly devised, nor can any clear parallel to future history be expected! No one can identify the end-time events in a way as to predict its arrival (Matthew 24:36; 1 Thessalonians 5:2)! And no one can predict literal people, events and time periods that are literally demonstrable or identifiable (e.g. the antichrist will be Napoleon or a Syrian, etc).]

Literal linear chronology. The futurist view believes that the book of Revelation contains a literal linear chronological order of events in history from the past (chapter 1) to the present (chapter 2 and 3) and to the future (chapter 4 to 22), however with a prophetic gap containing the present Church Age within this history. They stress that the visions in the book of Revelation were meant to be kept end to end. The futurist view is very much concerned with chronology: trying to point out the exact time when the predicted future events will take place.

The chronological *end point* of the book of Revelation is for futurists the second return of Jesus, the future millennium and the new earth. *By reasoning backwards from this end point* futurists conclude that the bulk of events in the book of Revelation must still be in the future, because the rapture (the first return of Jesus) has not yet happened and because according to futurists the symbols *seem* to call for a rapid succession of events rather than for a protracted process of events. They wrongly interpret Revelation 1:1 not as meaning, “what must *soon* take place”, but rather as meaning, “what must *quickly* take place”. Thus they believe that the events in the book of Revelation will take place in quick succession of each other.

The settling of the chronological *beginning point* is for futurists one of the crucial problems of interpreting the book of Revelation! When does the Lamb take the seven-sealed scroll from the hand of God and the events in the book of Revelation begin to unfold?

If this act of the Lamb is to be placed in our future (the futurist view), then the present Church Age is largely ‘a parenthesis’ or ‘prophetic gap’ in the chronology of the book of Revelation and the Lamb’s investiture with authority to open the seven-sealed scroll is yet to come in our future.

[**Remark.** However, *if* this act of the Lamb is identical with the resurrection-ascension-enthronement of Christ (the inaugurated millennial view), then the principles of God’s plan, which the seals symbolise, are already at work in present history!]

The futurist view calls whatever does not fit into their linear-chronological scheme of the book ‘an interval’.² Larkin has six intervals, which do not fit into his literal linear chronological scheme! However, these six intervals seem arbitrary and do not follow the text of the book of Revelation.

The first interval is the sealing of the 144 000 and the uncountable multitude (7:1-17).

[**Remark.** However, there is no biblical warrant to dissect the sealing of the 144 000 (7:1-8) from the trumpets of judgement (9:4).]

The second interval is the little book (10:1-11) and the two witnesses (11:1-14).

[**Remark.** However, there is no biblical warrant to regard Revelation chapter 11 as an interval when it uses the same time symbols (1260 days) as Revelation chapter 12.

The third interval is the Lamb on Mt. Zion, the three angels, the harvest and the judgement in the winepress (14:1-20).

[**Remark.** However, there is no biblical warrant to regard Revelation chapter 14 as only an announcement of the final winepress judgement in contrast to the execution of the final winepress judgement in Revelation chapter 19.

² Larkin pp. 13-16

The fourth interval is the three evil spirits gathering the people for the final battle (16:13-16).

[**Remark.** However, there is no biblical warrant to regard Revelation 16:13-16 as only an announcement of the final battle in contrast to the execution of this battle in Revelation 19:17-21.

The fifth interval is the praising multitude in heaven, the wedding of the Lamb and the final battle (19:1-21).

[**Remark.** However, there is no biblical warrant to regard the final battle in Revelation 20:7-10 as different to the final battle in Revelation 19:17-21.

The sixth interval is the binding of Satan, the first resurrection, the millennium and the loosening of Satan (20:1-7).

[**Remark.** However, by regarding Revelation 20:1-7 as an interval it can have no literal chronological significance in the futurist scheme of events! And yet the futurist view makes the millennium one of the main features of its interpretation! When the futurist view is forced to give up all its 'intervals or parentheses' in the book of Revelation, it cannot but recognise that the book of Revelation is *not* a linear-chronological description of future history, but seven parallel revelations of important events during the whole New Testament period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming!]

The rapture. The futurist view is anxiously looking towards the beginning of this future history at the so-called first return of Jesus (also called the parousia or coming), when the Church will be removed from this earth (the rapture) and God's programme with Israel may be resumed. The futurist view believes that the rapture will be imminent: it can occur at any moment, because there are no predicted events that must precede its occurrence! They believe that the rapture (the coming of Jesus on the clouds to remove the Church from the earth) will be invisible and inaudible for unbelievers. Believers will be translated into heaven to celebrate the wedding of the Lamb, while unbelievers will remain behind on earth to face the terrible tribulation period.

There is, however, considerable disagreement between futurists when exactly the rapture would take place.

- The pre-tribulation pre-millennial view believes that the rapture will take place at the beginning of the tribulation period (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 4:1).
- The mid-tribulation pre-millennial view believes that the rapture will take place in the middle of the tribulation period (between Revelation 6:11 and 6:12).
- The post-tribulation pre-millennial view believes that the rapture will take place at the end of the tribulation period immediately before the second return of Jesus to inaugurate the future millennium (Revelation 11:11-12; 14:14-16; 20:4). A growing number of futurists believe that there is only one second coming of Christ *at the end* of the great tribulation, but it will take place in two phases. The first phase is the rapture of all believers to meet Christ in the air and the second phase is the judgement of unbelievers then living upon the earth before Christ gathers his people into the millennial kingdom.

Future events. The removal of the Church from the earth will be followed by the conversion of Israel, the rebuilding of the evil city Babylon, the evil rule of the antichrist and the great tribulation. The tribulation period will end with the battle of Armageddon and the second return of Jesus to bind Satan and inaugurate the future millennial kingdom of peace. After 1000 literal years, Satan will be loosed to gather the Gentile nations for the battle of Gog and Magog against Israel. Finally the final judgement of all unbelievers and wicked people will take place before the great white throne and the universe and earth will be renewed.

b. Contribution of the futurist view

The futurist view takes the prophetic or predictive element in the book seriously (Revelation 1:19 and 4:1). The contents of the book lead up to the final establishment of the rule of God on the new heaven and the new earth, so that some of the visions of the book must refer to the last days, that is, the events immediately preceding and following the second coming of Jesus.

c. Limitation of the futurist view

This view removes the book from its historical setting so that from chapter 4 onwards the book contains no message for Christians living in the first century and thereafter, nor for Christians living today. The method

of literal interpretation leads to serious dogmatic aberrations and much disagreement about the identification of symbols with literal, demonstrable and identifiable historical events, persons and time-periods.

The futurist view removes the book of Revelation from its historical setting. The principal objection is that futurists tend to remove the book entirely from its historical setting! It is not easy to see what meaning the book would have had for its first readers, if this is the way the book is to be understood. It is also not easy to see what meaning the book should have for its readers today! The book was not only written in a concrete historical situation, but also for Christians living in that historical situation. And the book contains a message and blessing for Christians who read the book throughout the ages (1:3)!

The futurists view interprets prophecies, symbols and numbers literally. The method of literal interpretation takes words in their usual or primary sense and applies the ordinary rules of grammar without mysticism or allegory or metaphor.

The futurists believe that prophecies, symbols and numbers must necessarily be interpreted literally, that is, must necessarily refer to demonstrable or identifiable historical events, persons and time-periods. The main objection to futurist's method of interpretation is to take everything in the Bible as literally as possible, while the Old Testament and New Testament do not do so! Futurists regard literal interpretation as a characteristic of orthodoxy and figurative or symbolic interpretation as 'spiritualisation' and thus as a characteristic of liberalism.

[**Remark.** However, real orthodoxy is not necessarily interpreting the Bible literally, but rather interpreting the Bible according to what the context of the Bible demands! Thus, when the futurist by his literal interpretation deviates from the interpretation the Bible demands, then the futurist is a liberal.]

The literal hermeneutic leads futurists to believe that all Old Testament prophecies must be literally fulfilled. And because futurists believe that most of these prophecies have not yet been literally fulfilled, they must still be literally fulfilled in our future, in another 'dispensation'.

[**Remark.** However, a study of the New Testament fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies shows that not all Old Testament prophecies are *literally* fulfilled. The Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in the way the New Testament teaches (Amos 9:11-12 and Acts 15:12-18; Ezekiel 36:26 and Romans 2:28-29, 2 Corinthians 3:3)!]

The literal hermeneutic leads futurists to interpret the symbols and numbers in the visions of the book of Revelation as 'prophetic or predictive elements' rather than 'apocalyptic or unveiling elements'. Because futurists believe that these symbols and numbers must necessarily refer to demonstrable or identifiable future historical events, persons and time-periods, they must be interpreted as literally as possible. This often leads to imaginative allegorisation of prophecies and even presumptive speculation concerning future historical events, persons and time-periods.

[**Remark.** However, the book of Revelation itself shows that the symbols are figures of speech that point to realities that far surpass the literal understanding of the symbols (1:20; 5:5-6; 11:8; 12:9; 17:15; 21:2,9-10).]

The literal hermeneutic leads futurists to interpret two or more biblical terms referring to one and the same thing as referring to different things. For example, because the biblical term 'the gospel of the kingdom' is not literally the same as the biblical term 'the gospel of grace', futurists argue that these biblical terms must refer to two different gospels! Futurists then resolve the resulting contradiction in doctrine, which these different terms cause, by assigning each biblical term to a different dispensation (time period). They assign the gospel of grace for the Church period before the so-called first return of Jesus and the gospel of the (millennial) kingdom for the tribulation period after the first return of Jesus.

[**Remark.** However, in the New Testament these two terms denote the same reality (Matthew 4:23; Acts 8:12; 20:24-25; 28:23,31)!]

The literal hermeneutic leads the futurists to duplicate events, assign them to different dispensations and illustrate them in a very complicated graph.

Futurists distinguish several different covenants (with Noah, with patriarchs, with Israel on Sinai, with king David, with future Israel, with Christians in the New Testament). They distinguish two different plans of God (one with the Church and one with Israel), two different gospels (the gospel of grace for the Church and the gospel of the kingdom for Israel)(cf. Acts 20:24-25) and two different peoples of God (the Christian Church and Jewish Israel) (cf. John 10:16). They distinguish two different kingdoms (the kingdom of heaven for the Church and the millennial kingdom for Israel) (cf. Mark 4:30-31) and two different brides of God (the Church and Israel) (cf. Revelation 21:9-14). They distinguish two different second comings of Christ (the so-called first return of Jesus for the Church before the tribulation period and the so-called second return of Jesus after the tribulation period) (cf. Matthew 24:39-41; Luke 17:30-35). They distinguish several different resurrections from the dead (the resurrection of Christians at the first return of Jesus, the resurrection of the tribulation saints at the second return of Jesus and the resurrection of the unbelievers at the end of the millennial kingdom) (cf. John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). And they distinguish several different final judgements (the judgement of the conduct or works of Christians before the judgement seat of Christ at the first return of Jesus, the judgement of the Gentile nations with respect to how they have treated Israel before Christ's throne in heavenly glory at the second return of Jesus and the judgement of all unbelievers before the great white throne at the end of the millennial kingdom) (2 Peter 3:3-13). The literal hermeneutic leads to the division of the Bible into a Jewish Book consisting of the Old Testament, the four Gospels and the book of Revelation that deals with Israel, and into a Christian Book consisting of Acts and the Letters that deals with the Church.

[Remark. This differs from the division the Bible itself makes into the old covenant (testament) and the new covenant (testament) (Luke 22:20; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 8:6-13; 9:15).]

The literal hermeneutic leads the futurists to divide the whole history into seven dispensations. Their literal hermeneutic causes contradictions and contradistinctions, which the futurists must harmonise by assigning the irreconcilable differences to different dispensations! See supplement 4, dispensational and covenant theology.

PART 4. THE HISTORICIST-FUTURIST VIEW (DISPENSATIONALISM)

This view has a past, a present and a future without a historical gap.

PAST		PRESENT						FUTURE		
John								1 st return	2 nd return	
								↓	↓	
1 st century	2 nd century	----- SEVEN CHURCH PERIODS -----						ISRAEL	1000	NEW
							X today			
Rev 1:1-8	Rev chapter 1:9 – 3:22						c 4-19	c 20	c21-22	

a. The historicist-futurist view

The historicist-futurist view (also called the dispensational view) regards the book of Revelation as a prophecy, a symbolic prediction of literal identifiable future events, which are linked together to form a continuous story of the history from the first century A.D. until the end of time. After a short depiction of the historical events during the Church Age, the book depicts mainly future historical events for us today.

One historicist-futurist says, “The book of Revelation reveals the future: in it all unfulfilled prophecy is fulfilled. In it is revealed the future history of the Church (Revelation chapter 2 and 3) and the future history of the Jews (Revelation chapter 4 to 19). The book of Revelation being the last prophecy, sums up all previous prophecy concerning the Church, Israel and the nations, as represented by the foundation, the gates and the streets of the New Jerusalem.”³

The historicist-futurist view differs from the futurist view in one respect: it does not have a historic gap. Most futurists divide Revelation 1:9 to 3:22 as the historicists do with the rest of the book of Revelation. The

³ Larkin, Revelation p.3

letters to the seven congregations represent seven literally successive and identifiable Church periods from the 1st century A.D. to the second return of Christ.

The congregation of Ephesus represents the apostolic Church or the backslidden Church (A.D. 70-170). The Nicolaitans are regarded as a priestly order that overthrows the laity (the beginning of the Roman Catholic Church).

The congregation of Smyrna represents the martyr Church or persecuted Church (A.D. 170-312). The ten great persecutions under the Roman emperors until Emperor Constantine introduce the State Church.

The congregation of Pergamum represents the worldly Church or licentious Church (A.D. 312-606). The State is married to the Church, Satan shifts his throne from Babylon to Pergamum and Boniface III is crowned as the Universal Bishop.

The congregation of Thyatira represents the apostate Church or lax Church (A.D. 606-1520). The prophetess Jezebel represents the papal system until the Reformation.

The congregation of Sardis represents the Church of the Reformation or the dead Church (A.D. 1520-1750).

The congregation of Philadelphia represents the live Church or the favoured Church (A.D. 1750-1900) – the period of great revivals and missionary work.

The congregation of Laodicea represents the lukewarm Church of today (A.D. 1900 onwards)!

What is to be expected is the rapture and futurists believe that the rapture is imminent.

b. Contribution of the historicist-futurist view

This view stresses and appreciates the continuity of God's hand in history and takes the prophetic or predictive element in the book seriously.

The historicist-futurist view shows that the pure futurist view is inconsistent. Both the futurist view and the historicist-futurist view believe in literal linear chronology for Revelation 4:1 to 19:21. However, the futurist does not apply this principle to the seven letters to the seven congregations in Revelation 2:1 to 3:22 - it divides the Church Age vertically and regards the seven congregations as contemporary. But the historicist-futurist applies this principle to the seven congregations in Revelation 2:1 to 3:22 – it divides the Church Age horizontally and regards the seven congregations as seven historical periods in Church history.

[Remark. If according to the futurist view Revelation chapters 1 to 3 do not necessarily represent a chronological time-chart of seven Church periods, then Revelation chapters 4 to 20 also do not necessarily represent a chronological time-chart of the so-called future tribulation period or the so-called future millennial kingdom!

And if the seven letters represent contemporaneous types of congregations in any period throughout the New Testament period, then Revelation chapter 4 to 20 also represent contemporaneous events (of salvation and judgement) in any period throughout the entire New Testament period!]

c. Limitation of the historicist-futurist view

The literal hermeneutic of the historicist-futurist view leads to serious dogmatic aberrations and much disagreement about the identification of symbols with demonstrable or identifiable historical events, persons and time-periods.

The historicist-futurist view causes the book of Revelation to have little relevance to Christians today. According to the futurist view a Christian today lives within no identifiable period of the book of Revelation. But according to historicist-futurist view a Christian today lives within the 7th Church period, which is not a very encouraging period. And the rest of the book of Revelation has no direct reference to a Christian's life.

PART 5. THE SYMBOLIC IMAGINARY VIEW

This view has only historical trends, but no specific historical events.

			HISTORICAL					a definite end of evil
			TRENDS					ultimate victory of Christ

a. The symbolic imaginary view (also called the idealist or poetic view)

The symbolic imaginary view regards the book of Revelation as a symbolic presentation of imagined or hypothetical historical trends, not of specific historical events and also not of predictable future events. The book depicts only historical trends, but no specific historical events in the past, present or future.

The book must be understood in terms of historical trends as well as by historical episodes, in which historical trends are more important than individual events that are part of them. The book reflects the conflict between Christ and the forces of evil, which persists in every age until the end.

The main thrust of the book is concerned with inspiring persecuted and suffering Christians to endure to the end. The writer employs symbolic language, not meaning it to be taken for anything other than a series of imaginative descriptions of the triumph of God. The symbols are interpreted figuratively and have no immediate historic connection with any literal or definitive social or political events. This view refuses to assign symbols any literal historical significance for the future and it denies all predictive prophecy.

b. Contribution of the symbolic imaginary view

The symbolic imaginary view emphasises God's triumph in world history and encourages Christians.

Its main message is an irresistible summons to heroic (godly) living; a matchless appeal to endurance in suffering; an encouragement that evil is marked to be overthrown in the end; a new and wonderful picture of Christ; a revelation that history is in the mind of God and in the hand of Christ. It predicts that evil will have a definite end and that Christ will be ultimately victorious at a specific time and place. The emphasis is on the ultimate triumph of God and the challenge for Christians to live for God in days when opposition is fierce.

c. Limitation of the symbolic imaginary view

The symbolic imaginary view causes the message of the book to become too abstract and elusive. This view overlooks the fact that the book calls itself an apocalypse and a prophecy and not an allegory or figurative teaching.

(Futurists say, "The spiritual interpretation allows no concrete significance to whatever the symbols signify. The symbols are only abstract and may be attached to any time and any place, like Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress". Thus the book may mean anything and nothing according to the whim of the interpreter." This judgement is not fair.)

PART 6. EVALUATION OF THE TRADITIONAL VIEWS

None of the above traditional views have proved completely satisfying.

A true view probably combines elements from more than one of the above main views. The outstanding merit of each of these views is the following:

a. The preterit view takes the historical background of the book serious and acknowledges the book's significance for the Christians during the time it was written. This insight must be retained!

b. The historicist view takes the continuous involvement of God in history serious and acknowledges the book's significance for Christians throughout history. This insight cannot be surrendered!

c. **The futurist view** takes the book's language about the end-time serious and acknowledges its significance for people living in the end-time. This insight must be retained!

d. **The historicist-futurist** view shows the inconsistency of the pure futurist view. This must be taken into account.

e. **The symbolic imaginary or idealist view** takes the book's message concerning God's triumph serious and acknowledges the book's encouraging and challenging significance for Christians throughout history. The book challenges the Christian Church to live for God in days when the opposition is fierce. This view cannot be abandoned!

f. **The symbolic literal view**, also called the inaugurated or realised millennial view, is the only view which can stand the test of being consistently biblical.

PART 7. THE SYMBOLIC LITERAL VIEW (INAUGURATED / REALISED MILLENNIALISM)

This view has a past, a present and a future.

The inaugurated view stresses literal historic trends and literal historic events.

Both the symbolic imaginary view and the symbolic literal view agree that the contents of the book of Revelation cannot be fitted into some definable era of history and that the contents do not refer to specific known persons, events and time-periods. Therefore, the non-linear chronological approaches agree that the book of Revelation is a *symbolic* presentation of events.

They disagree about whether these symbolic events are purely imaginary or hypothetical (idealist) or literally historical (realist). According to the idealist view the visions consisting of symbols and numbers represent historical trends, but not specific historical events. But according to the realist view the visions containing symbols and numbers represent literal historical trends as well as literal historical events, which are not necessarily demonstrable or identifiable historical events, persons or time-periods.

I	= an identifiable beginning	A	= first coming of Christ
II	= a long main period of events	B	= second coming of Christ
III	= a short period of events	C	= the resurrection and final judgement
IV	= an identifiable end	D	= the new heaven and new earth

SEVEN PARALLEL SECTIONS WITH PROGRESSIVE CONTENTS				
PAST	PRESENT		FUTURE	
A			B	C D
↓	----- symbolic 1000 years -----		↓	↓ ↓
I	II		X present	III IV
1	The Christ-indwelt Church in the world (Rev 1-3) (7 lampstands)		→	3:10
2	↓ The Church suffering trial and persecution (Rev 4-7) (7 seals)		(seals)	6:9-11 →
3	↓ The Church avenged, protected and victorious (Rev 8-11) (7 trumpets)		(trumpets)	11:7-10 →
			↓	
4	Christ opposed by the dragon and his helpers (Rev 12-14) (Christ + dragon)		↓	13:12-16 →
5	↓ Final wrath upon the impenitent (Rev 15-16) (7 bowls of wrath)		(bowls)	16:12-16 →
6	↓ The fall of Babylon and the beast (Rev 17-19) (fall of opponents)			19:17-21 →
7	↓ The dragon's doom, Christ and Church victors (Rev 20-22) (consummation)			20:7-10 →

The characteristics of the inaugurated or realised millennial view are the following:

a. **The visions contain symbols and numbers**

The first apocalypse was Daniel. This was followed by a large group of imitative apocalypses between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100, such as Enoch, Assumption of Moses, 4 Ezra and the apocalypse of Baruch. See supplement 4: dispensational or covenant theology. The book of Revelation is also an apocalypse.

Apocalypses are characterised by their use of highly symbolic language to describe a series of events in history and by their concern with the end of the age and the establishment of the kingdom of God. The word 'apocalypse' (1:1) means unveiling, disclosing, revealing and this is done in the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation by means of visions consisting of symbols and numbers.

The book of Revelation must be interpreted, not by literalising or spiritualising the symbols and numbers, but by interpreting the symbols and numbers in the light of *how* the New Testament interprets both symbols and numbers in the prophecies of the Old Testament. It is obvious that symbols like "a burning mountain cast into the sea" (8:8), "the locusts coming out of the Abyss" (9:1-12), "the eating of the little scroll" (10:9-10) and "a beast with seven heads and ten horns" (13:1-2) must be interpreted symbolically.

All the symbols and numbers refer to literal historical trends and events that surpass the merely literal interpretation of the symbols and numbers themselves. These literal historical trends and events are not necessarily demonstrable or identifiable events, person or time-periods in history. They are also not necessarily only future events, persons or time-periods. The visions refer to recurring trends and events throughout the history of the New Testament period. These recurring trends and events throughout the history of the New Testament period develop towards a climax in the end-time. The trends and events during the end-time are clearly taught in other parts of the New Testament, as for example, "the signs of the times" (Matthew 24), "the apostasy or rebellion" and "oppression under the antichrist", "the second coming of Christ", "the final judgement" and "the renewal of all things" (2 Peter 3).

b. The reduplication of visions in a parallel way

Characteristic of the apocalyptic approach of Daniel is the reduplication of the visions concerning the four kingdoms (Daniel chapters 2, 7, 8, 9 and 10 to 12). And characteristic of the apocalyptic approach of Revelation is the reduplication of the visions of the whole New Testament period in seven identifiable sections with an identifiable beginning, a long and a short period of events and an identifiable end. These sections in the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation are both parallel and also show an increase or progress of contents.

The contents of the book of Revelation are arranged in a parallel way (represented by the 7 parallel lines). The book of Revelation contains repetitions with differences and looks at the history of the Church and the world from different points of view. The seven identifiable parallel sections view the events in Church history and world history from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming as through a kaleidoscope, that is, they view the same history, but in each section from a different point of view. Each of the seven sections focuses on another divine principle.

c. The arrangement of the contents in a progressive way

There is a progressive line in the revelation of the history of the world as described in the book of Revelation. The first progression is from the establishment of the Church to the persecution of the Church (chapters 1 to 3). The second progression is from the persecution of the Church to the judgements of its persecutors (chapters 4 to 7). The third progression is from the destruction of a fourth of something to the destruction of a third thereof (chapters 7-11). The opening of the fourth seal affects a quarter of the earth (6:8). But the sounding of the fourth trumpet affects a third of the earth (8:7-11). God's judgements over the godless and the wicked are always worse than God's general trials over all people.

There is an increase in intensity of spiritual conflict (represented by the three light and four shaded parts). The seven sections may be grouped into two major parts: Revelation chapter 1 to 11 reveals the Christ-indwelt Church persecuted by the world. Revelation chapter 12 to 22 reveals the deeper spiritual background of this struggle. It is a conflict between Christ and Satan, in which Christ and his Church are victorious.

There is an increase in revelation of principles of human conduct and divine-moral government (represented by the vertical arrows). The book of revelation is a unity. The principles of human (Christian and non-Christian) conduct and divine moral government are revealed or unveiled in an increasing measure: the seals of persecution and trials bring about the trumpets of warning and judgement, and these again bring about the bowls of final punishing judgements.

There is an increase in emphasis on the end-time events (represented by the horizontal arrows). The later sections have more contents with regard to the end-time events. The seven sections are arranged in an ascending order towards a climax. The later sections have more contents with regard to the end-time events. There is a progress in eschatological emphasis: the final judgement is first announced (1:7); then introduced (6:12-17; 11:18); and finally described (14:14-20; 15:1/16:1-21; 19:11-21; 20:11-15). The new heaven and earth are described more fully in the final section (chapter 21-22) than in the preceding sections (2:7, etc.; 7:9-17; 14:1-5).

d. The revelation of God's (Church) history in world history

The book is not a prophetic-chart or time-table of specific future events, but primarily a revelation or unveiling of God's plan with respect to past, present and future Church history in world history, including the end of Church history and world history. The book of Revelation is above everything concerned, not with what will happen in the future, but with the meaning or message of the things that happen in the past, present and future history. The book is a Christian philosophy and interpretation of Church history within world-history, especially of its end.

The past. The book is rooted in the concrete historical situation of the Christian Church living in the Roman Empire of the first century and thus the book first of all had meaning for the Christian Church of the day in which it was written (Revelation chapter 2 and 3). The visions with its symbols and numbers point to realities during the first century. The contents of the book as a whole begin to be fulfilled immediately after it was written (A.D. 70-98). The book is a revelation or unveiling of "what must soon or shortly take place" (1:1), because "the time is near or at hand" (1:3). That is the terminus a quo (starting point) of the book's contents. Later, the contents refer back towards the first coming of Christ (12:5) and even to the Old Testament Israel which brought forth the Messiah (12:1-2).

The present. The book is addressed to all its readers and hearers wherever and whenever they may be found (1:3) and to all congregations wherever and whenever they exist (2:7). The visions John saw do not only refer to "what will take place later", but also to "what is now" (1:19). The book reveals or unveils the principles of human (Christian and non-Christian) conduct as well as of divine moral government throughout the whole Church- and world history (the seven seals). Thus, the book is concerned with the whole Church history within world history, and is not simply a snapshot of a very short period in the end-time. The book gives light which reveals or unveils God's plan, spurs on towards perseverance, and gives assurance of the ultimate victory of Christ and his Church throughout the whole New Testament period between the first and second coming of Christ!

The future. The seven parallel sections of the book are arranged in a progressive order towards a climax and point to an intensifying of these historical trends and events during the end-time. The book speaks of the final battle on the great day of God Almighty (16:14; 19:19; 20:8), the fall of Babylon (14:8; 16:19; chapter 18), the final judgement and end of the present world (6:12-17; 11:18; 14:7,14-20; 15:1/16:1-21; 19:11-21; 20:11-15), the second coming (14:14; 19:11-16) and the renewal of all things (2:7, etc.; 7:9-17; 14:1-5; chapter 21-22). Thus, the book is also concerned with specific events shortly before Christ's second coming, with the ultimate and end-time triumph of Christ and his Church over the dragon and his helpers.

The final end of this history will be the one and only second coming of Christ, the one and only resurrection of all people from the dead, the one and only final judgement of all people, and finally the renewal of the universe into a new heaven and new earth. But before this final end, will also come the final consummation of evil in its antichristian -political, -economic, -social, -religious, -and moral organisation, in which are concentrated all the elements of evil that existed in the world of the first century A.D., that have persisted in the succeeding centuries and that will intensify in the end-time.