

# Bible Snapshots



## **Revelation (1) – Victory in Jesus** ***The Manner of Book***

**Author – John,**

- Revelation is often misunderstood and is, admittedly, a difficult book because it presents a unique challenge in that it stands alone among the New Testament literature in the manner and method of the message delivered. It would be naïve to think that we could ever understand the book without looking at these introductory issues that the original readers would have instinctually understood. Our distance, however, from them culturally renders it necessary to look at the difficulties deliberately and to consider them as introductory issues.
- It should first be observed that Revelation, like most New Testament books, is an epistle, written to a specific audience. It is a letter and was to be received as such (1:11). The introduction reads like any other letter than an individual or congregation might receive from Paul or Peter or Jude. Similarly, it ends the same way most of the epistles do – “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” This being the case, it must be read using the same philosophy consistent with a letter written to an audience in the first century.

## **Four Views of Revelation**

There are essentially four different views of Revelation, or at least chapters 4-19, which will greatly affect how one will interpret the meaning of the individual passages. For the sake of time we will not detail each position, but rather point out the basic challenges to each that make them particularly difficult and perhaps point us to what, I believe, is the best and most accurate and reasonable way to study the book of Revelation, which we are going to call the limited preterist view.

### ***The Futurist View***

Proponents of the futurist view say that their approach is necessary because there is no correspondence between the events prophesied in the book and anything that has happened in history. This conclusion is reached because of an overly literalistic approach to the symbolism of the book and a lack of appreciation for how such language was used in the Old Testament prophetic books. This, however, is not the most serious problem with the futurist approach.

The most fundamental problem with the futurist approach is that it requires a very artificial reading of the many texts within the book itself that point to the imminent fulfillment of its prophecies. The book opens and closes with declarations indicating that the things revealed in the book “must soon take place” (1:1; 22:6). It opens and closes with declarations indicating that “the time is near” (1:3; 22:10). The book of Revelation does not begin in the way the pseudepigraphal Book of Enoch begins, with a statement to the effect that the content is not for the present generation, but for a remote generation that is still to come. The book of Revelation has direct relevance to the real historical first century churches to whom it was addressed, and the text of the book itself points to the imminent fulfillment of most of its prophecies.

### ***The Historic view***

The historicist approach faces more serious difficulties than the futurist approach. As Poythress observes, "Of the four schools of interpretation, historicism is undoubtedly the weakest, though it was popular centuries ago."<sup>xi</sup> The most serious problem with the historicist approach is its subjectivity and arbitrariness.<sup>xii</sup> Historicist interpreters through the ages invariably identify their own age as the final age.<sup>xiii</sup> They then fit the prophecies of the book with whatever important events have transpired between the first century and their own day. The result is that the basic historicist interpretation of the book changes from one generation to the next.

### **Idealist View**

The idealist approach is held by many in the present day, but it is fundamentally flawed as a method of interpreting the book of Revelation. Its most serious problem is that it brushes over the specificity found within the text. Bauckham explains, "Thus it would be a serious mistake to understand the images of Revelation as timeless symbols. Their character conforms to the contextuality of Revelation as a letter to the seven churches of Asia. Their resonances in the specific social, political, cultural and religious world of their first readers need to be understood if their meaning is to be appropriated today."<sup>xiv</sup>

Not only does the idealist approach tend to ignore the historic specificity demanded by its character as a letter, it also tends to ignore the hermeneutical implications of its character as a prophecy. The Old Testament prophets used highly figurative and symbolic language, but they used this language to speak of real historical nations and specific impending historical judgments. Writing his own prophetic book, John does the same

### **Archeology**

- I made pools of water – 2:6 – These pools, built by Solomon, served as reservoirs, and conduits carried the water in Jerusalem. Today, within cemented walls, they are still in use. In 1948, construction workers built a new road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and unearthed two conduits, one about a foot over the other. The lower one turned out to be one dating back to the days of Solomon and the upper one built by the Romans about 900 years later. Funny, if they would just have dug a foot deeper, they could have just used Solomon's

### **Important Customs**

- A good name is better than precious ointment (7:1) – Eastern perfumes and ointments are extremely costly and are kept in expensive vases and jars of alabaster stone or costly metal. It is the pride of a Palestinian to own such perfumes. But a man whose character was such that he maintained a good reputation, his name was more precious and his life was the envy of all his neighbors.

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