



Four Hermeneutical Approaches to Revelation

Preterist:

- From Latin *praeter* ("past")
- Assumes written to 7 actual churches in John's day
- Concludes that most or all prophesied events were fulfilled in 1st century
- Asks how was this letter understood in its day? How would its recipients have read it? What was happening then that we need to understand in order to understand the letter?

Idealist:

- Reads Revelation as an allegory depicting the ongoing battle between good and evil
- Popularized by Augustine
- After Constantine adopted Christianity, the Church didn't want to vilify the Roman Empire. This view focused Revelation on the conflict between God and Satan from the beginning of time, neutralizing revolutionary dimensions of the text.
- Dominant reading until 1800s

Futurist:

- Sees Revelation as focused almost entirely what's to come
- "Prophetic" view: Revelation predicts events leading to the end of the world
- Popular and influential in U.S. (churches, media: *Left Behind*, etc.)
- Emerged from dispensational & fundamentalist roots in 1800s (John Darby in England... Scofield Bible in US... Pentecostal preachers merged with prosperity message...)

Historicist:

- Sees Revelation as interpretation of history to this point
- Sees messages to churches as messages to the Church in different historical eras (from apostolic church represented by Ephesus to apostate church represented by Laodicea)
- In each era, assumes that we are in the 7th cycle, and identifies symbolic events in Rev with specific events by looking back over history
 - So in medieval Europe, the threat of Muslim conquest was the 7th cycle
 - ...and in the Reformation, the Pope became the antichrist
 - ...Communism...Ayatollah...ISIS...

Both futurists and historicists see Revelation as speaking to a modern audience (and strangely irrelevant to original recipients).