

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church
107 East Austin
Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

A0510 -- Mar. 06, 2005 – Various – Five Views of Revelation

Last week we had three questions turned in. Let's start with those. From here on out I'm going to ask you to direct your questions to the main topic of the teaching. Last week the topic was "interpretation". We've got to stay on task and not jump ahead in the book. I'll answer all three questions this week but in the future if you have some question about Revelation 22, at least wait until we get to Revelation 22 before putting your question in. Remember, we're going to answer these prophetic questions the same way we would answer questions about non-prophetic portions of Scripture. We're going to interpret Scripture literally rather than allegorically. By literal we mean interpreting according to the normal principles of grammar and the facts of history recognizing the peculiar nature of prophecy and figures of speech. By allegorical we mean taking the literal words in the text and assigning secondary meanings to them that are not expressly taught in the words. We are not going to allegorize. We are going to stick with the normal interpretation of the text.

Question 1: "What will the people who died be doing during the 1,000 year reign?" I'm not sure which people are being referred to in this question so I will have to answer several questions. The OT teaches that all the dead, believers and unbelievers, went immediately to a place called Sheol or Hades. Sheol and Hades are not Hell or the Lake of Fire. These are distinct places. We find in Luke 16:19-31, under the OT economy that Sheol or Hades had three compartments: 1) Abraham's bosom, 2) Place of Torment, and between them 3) a Great Gulf Fixed. The spirits of all OT believers went to **Abraham's bosom** at the moment they died. The spirits of all OT unbelievers went to the **Place of Torment** the moment they died. In between them is a **Great Gulf Fixed**. Believers can't cross over to the Place of Torment and unbelievers can't cross over to Abraham's bosom. This was the state of affairs until the resurrection. After Christ died on the cross, was buried, and received the keys of death and Hades (Rev 1:18), He descended to Hades and released all the believers from Adam to the thief on the cross and took them to Paradise in heaven. This is why Jesus said to the thief on the cross "today you shall be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). All the unbelievers remain in Hades in the **Place of Torment**. They will remain

there until the Great White Throne Judgment at the end of the 1,000 year kingdom. What are they doing there? We are given one hint in Luke 16:24, 25 that they are in “agony”. Before Christ’s resurrection they could see the believers in Abraham’s bosom but once that compartment was emptied they are staring into a void. They will remain in agony for the 1,000 years and will be resurrected at the end of the 1,000 years at the Great White Throne Judgment and cast into the Lake of Fire that was created for the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41). The spirits of believers who died after the resurrection no longer go to Hades since that chamber was emptied at the resurrection. The spirits of believers now go immediately to heaven to be with all the other departed believers from the Old and New Testament. Church age believers will receive a resurrection body at the pre-trib rapture and will come back to earth with Christ at the Second Coming and will reign on the earth for 1,000 years outside of the promised Land. Israelite believers will be given resurrection bodies at the Second Coming and will inherit all the promises of the unconditional covenants at that time. They will enjoy peace and prosperity in their promised Land under Messiah’s rule for 1,000 years.

Question 2: “Why are the tribes of Dan and Ephraim not included in Revelation 7?” This question has puzzled many Christians. Some have posited that the reason Dan is not mentioned is because the Antichrist will come from the tribe of Dan. But this is impossible because the Antichrist will not be a Jew but a Gentile as per Dan 11:36 and Rev 13:1. Further, the whole tribe of Dan would not be punished simply because of one man. The real reason Dan and Ephraim are not included in Rev 7 is not known. What I can tell you is that the Bible insists on listing 12 tribes, never 13. There are actually 13 tribes because Joseph’s two sons Manasseh and Ephraim were adopted by Jacob in Gen 48. But, in every place the tribes are listed the list always leaves someone off the list in order to maintain a list of 12. It is interesting to note that Dan and Ephraim, while not listed in Rev 7 as having 12,000 sealed from their tribes are listed in Ezekiel 48 as receiving a designated portion of the Promised Land during the 1,000 years.

Question 3: “If literalism is a pre-requisite for “knowing anything”, and “faith” is a pre-requisite for literalism, isn’t rationality a figment of antiquated monotheism?” This is a *non-sequitur* (this doesn’t logically follow). Nor did I say that “faith” was a pre-requisite for literalism. Everyone interprets literature literally most of the time. The proper syllogism would conclude that knowledge of anything is contingent on faith as per Prov 1:7. This question assumes that faith is irrational. But, biblical faith is perfectly rational. In fact, it is irrational for someone not to have faith in Christ. The most logical thing for a person to do is to place their faith in Christ. Biblical faith does not mean “a blind leap”. We are not following the existential Christianity of Kierkegaard expressed in Karl Barth where we just

have to leap out there and believe regardless of the so-called facts. Further, rationality is a coherent expression of the mind of God whereas rationalism is expression of the autonomous human mind. I would not agree that “rationality is a figment of antiquated monotheism”. Rationality is inherent in the mind of God and is expressed in God’s written revelation. Therefore, rationality exists only because God exists. Rationalism exists because man is in rebellion against God. Christians can be rational but they should never be rationalistic. In other words, Christians can think God’s thoughts after Him but we should never think our own autonomous thoughts. That’s the difference between “rationality” and “rationalism”. Faith and rationality should not be pitted against one another. There is no dichotomy between faith and rationality. The reason ancient monotheist’s of Israel believed in rationality was because they believed in a rational God. Greek philosophy, which irrationally assumed rationality, would never have gotten off the ground without the concepts that came out of the Hebrew Bible.

Now, before we look at the five views of Revelation let’s quickly re-define literal versus allegorical interpretation. Literal interpretation means interpreting according to the normal principles of grammar and facts of history, remembering the peculiar nature of predictive prophecy throughout the Bible. Allegorical interpretation takes the literal words in the text and assigns secondary meanings to them that are not expressly taught in the words (e.g. when we read “Church” that means “Israel”. See how Israel is imported into the word “Church” even when it’s not their? That’s a theological bias, not exegesis). You’ll want to keep these two ways of interpreting in mind as we look at the five views of Revelation. See if you can detect which view(s) are literal and which view(s) are allegorical.

Now for the five views of Revelation. These should be quite easy to understand although I can’t give you all the details. There are five basic views of Revelation. These are described as 1) Past fulfillment, 2) Present fulfillment, 3) Future fulfillment, 4) Timeless fulfillment, and 5) Mixed, which is just a combination of the other views.

Systems of Interpretation Compared		
Name	Time Period	Revelation Chapters 4-19
<u>Preterism</u>	past	Describe the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 or the fall of Rome in A.D. 476.
<u>Historicism</u>	present	Describe major events of Christian history spanning from John's time to the Second Coming of Christ.
<u>Futurism</u>	future	Describe a future period prior to the Second Coming of Christ.
<u>Idealism</u>	timeless	Describe spiritual truths. Good will eventually prevail over evil. Readers are encouraged in their current trials.
<u>Ecclectic</u>	mixed	Typically favors idealism while borrowing some elements from other systems.

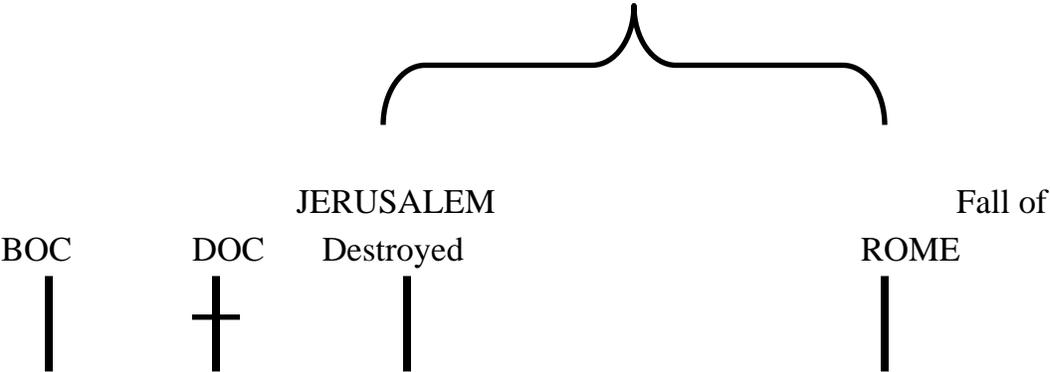
First, we have **Past**, also known as **Preterism**. This view teaches that Rev 4-19 was fulfilled in AD70 with the Fall of Jerusalem or with the Fall of Rome in AD 476. So, the entirety of Revelation 4-19 has already been fulfilled. There are three different variations of Preterism which I'll return to in a moment.

PRETERISM

(Past Fulfillment)

REVELATION 4-19

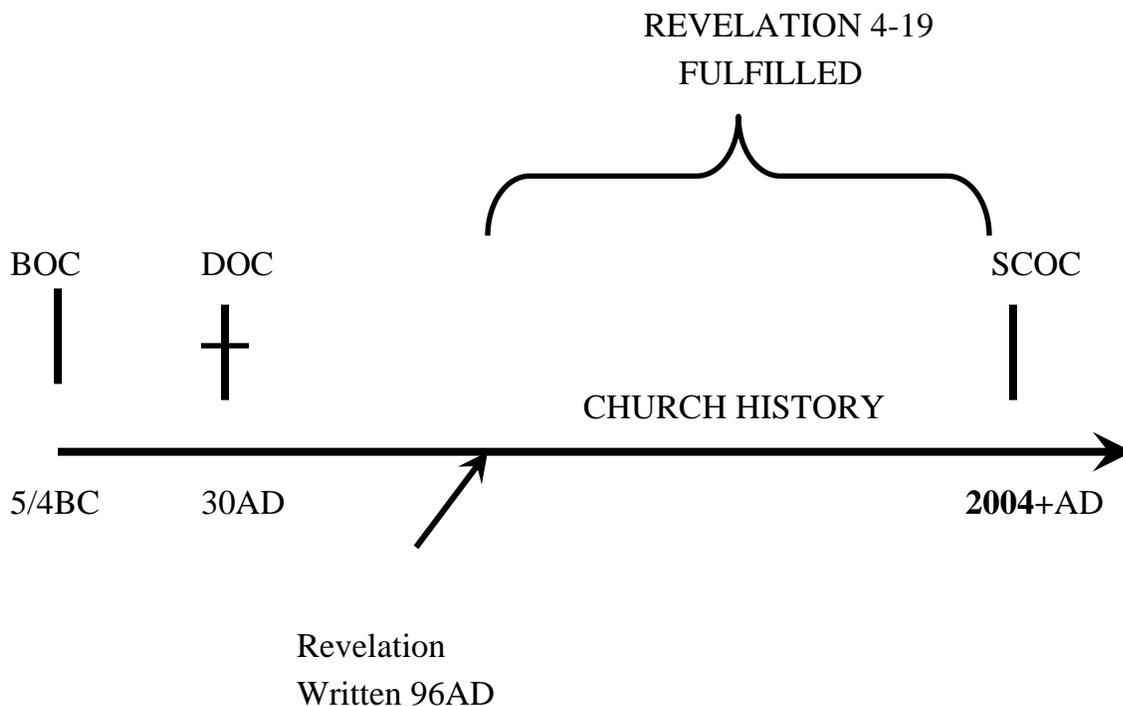
FULFILLED





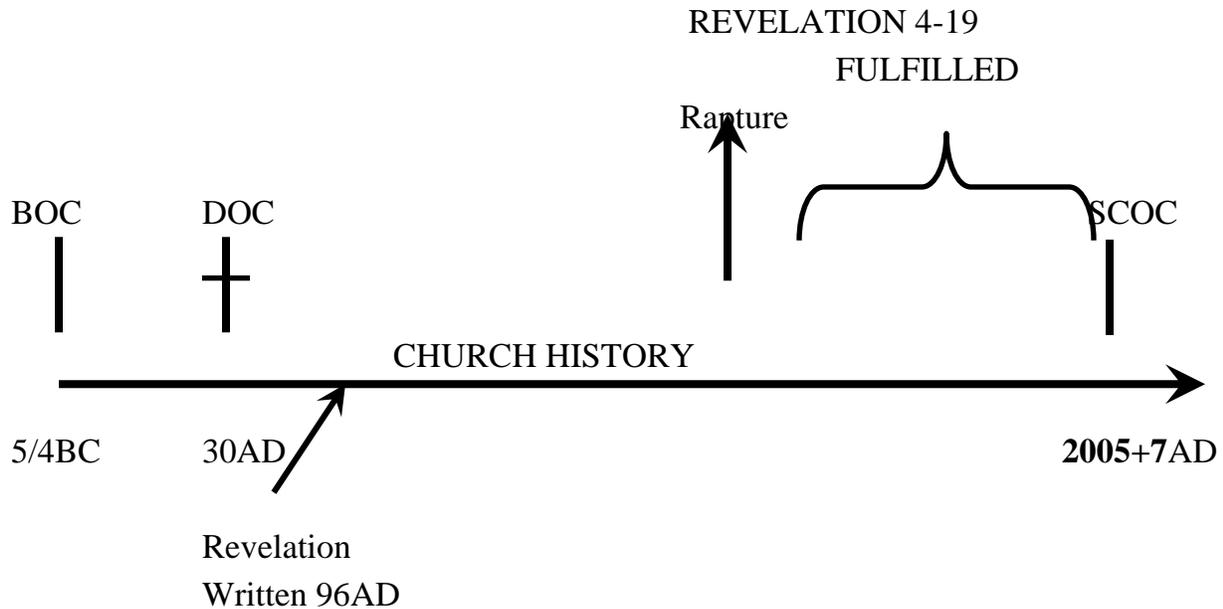
Second, we have **Present**, also known as **Historical-Continuous**. This view teaches that Rev 4-19 describes events in Church History spanning from John's day to the Second Coming of Christ. Seventh Day Adventists and David Koresh's Waco group held to this view. David Koresh and his group thought they were in the Tribulation and that they were the chosen people and that the government was the Antichrist. You wonder where these people are coming from. Everyone has an eschatology and whatever you believe about the future dramatically affects how you live in the present. These people were just living out their eschatology (belief about end-times). Interestingly, but not funny, is the fact that these people went down in flames.

HISTORICAL-CONTINUOUS
(Present Fulfillment)



Third, we have **Future**, also known as **Futurism**. This view teaches that Rev 4-19 describes events in the future prior to the Second Coming of Christ.

FUTURISM
(*Future Fulfillment*)



Fourth, we have **Timeless**, also known as **Idealism**. This view teaches that Rev 4-19 is describing spiritual truths. Good will eventually prevail over evil. Readers are being encouraged in their current trials. There is no way to chart Idealism because the events in Revelation are not supposed to be put on a time-scale. The most you can say is that Revelation is basically saying “stick in there, we’re going to win.”

Fifth, we have **Eclectic**, also known as **Mixed** or **Smorgasbord** Approach. This view teaches a combination of the other four views. You can’t decide what to believe so you just borrow your favorite elements from the other systems. Eclecticism typically resembles idealism while borrowing some elements from other systems.

We’ve looked at all five views of Revelation and now I want to make the key observation. The key observation is this. Adherents to **Preterism**, **Historicism**, **Idealism**, and **Eclectic** differ widely in the details of their view. For example, what I’m saying is that even within **Preterism** there are significant differences in their interpretations of the details. For example, some Preterists believe the 2nd Coming of Christ happened in 70AD and we now live in the New Heavens and New Earth. Other Preterists believe the 2nd Coming is still future. So, there is a lot of disagreement even within **Preterism**. Another example would be **Historicism**. Within **Historicism** there are very different interpretations of which events the symbols in revelation line up with in Church History. What does this tell you about

these four approaches? If they can't even agree within their own views then what does that tell you about their approach to the Book of Revelation? It tells you something's wrong? The reason something is wrong is because the views of **Preterism**, **Historicism**, **Idealism**, and **Eclectic** all use allegorical interpretation. That's why even within their own views there are significant differences of interpretation. It is true that these groups use *literal* interpretation at times. For example, almost everyone agrees that we should take the number 666 literally as the number of a man who is the Antichrist. But all of a sudden when they come to the 144,000 sealed Jewish saints, 12,000 from each tribe they interpret that in all sorts of different ways. The only way so many different conclusions could be drawn is if allegorical interpretation is involved. Taking it straightforwardly 144,000 sealed Jewish saints = 144,000 sealed Jewish saints. So, the all-important observation is that these four views rely heavily on allegorical interpretation.

The only view that does not use allegorical interpretation is **Futurism**. Adherents to **Futurism** agree to a very high degree in their interpretation of Revelation. Sure, there are some details that Futurists disagree on. You're always going to have a few differences when you deal with prophecy because for the Futurist these events have not taken place yet. But, significantly, Futurists agree to a remarkably high degree. What does this show you about the proper approach to understanding the Book of Revelation? It shows you that the only approach that is objective and let's God's word speak for itself is **Futurism**. All the other views differ from one another and within themselves because they are engaging in allegorical interpretation. And when you engage in allegorical interpretation it's up to the interpreter to read his own meaning into the text. The interpreter becomes the final authority. This leads into I've got my truth and you've got your truth. It leads to the idea that truth is relative. That's why there have been so many different interpretations. Once you get away from literal/normal interpretation you get farther and farther away from God's intended meaning. So, I cannot advocate any of these four views because if we want to remain objective we have to rely solely on *literal* interpretation as traditionally defined. Remember, *allegorical* interpretation means that we assign secondary meanings to literal words even though these meanings are not taught explicitly in the words. You don't want to do that. You want to apply the normal principles of grammar and look at the facts of history, remembering the peculiar nature of prophecy and taking account of figures of speech. Let's take a few minutes to back up and look at Preterism because Preterism is the only view today that is really growing. The Mixed approach may be growing some too but the biggest threat is Preterism.

Preterism. This name comes from the Latin *praeter* meaning "past". The things in Rev 4-19 are in the past. Preterism has been around since the Jesuit Alcasar in 1614. He developed

this view in response to the Reformers who were claiming that the two Beasts of Revelation 13 were the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope. Alcasar responded by saying this was impossible because Rev 13 was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD or in the Fall of Rome in AD 476. If these prophecies were already fulfilled then the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope could not possibly be the Beasts of Revelation 13. Later this view came to be held among Liberal scholars because it downplays prophecy. You better watch out for this because I already know that this view is held among people in Fredericksburg and Kerrville.

There are three forms of Preterism. Mild, Moderate, and Extreme (or Consistent). Hardly anyone holds to **Mild Preterism** today. **Moderate Preterism** has become mainstream preterism. Simply put, moderates see almost all prophecy as fulfilled in the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem, but they also believe that a few passages still teach a yet future second coming (Acts 1:9-11; 1Cor. 15:51-53; 1Th. 4:16-17) and the resurrection of believers at Christ's bodily return. Some popular proponents of this view include R.C. Sproul, Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. and Gary DeMar. Lastly we have **Extreme** or **Consistent Preterism**. These people are more consistent than the moderates. They like to be called Consistent Preterists rather than Extreme Preterists. Extreme Preterists believe that "the second coming MUST HAVE already occurred, since it was one of the things predicted in the O.T. which had to be fulfilled by the time Jerusalem was destroyed" . . . This means there will never be a future 2nd Coming, for it already occurred in A. D. 70. Further, there will be no bodily resurrection of believers, which is said to have occurred in A.D. 70 in conjunction with the 2nd coming. Full preterists believe that we already been spiritually resurrected and will live forever with spiritual bodies after we die. You will not get a new physical body. They reject a physical resurrection and say your resurrection is only spiritual. Consistent preterists also say that we are now living in what we would call the eternal state or the new heavens and new earth of Revelation 21-22. Champions of this view include the originator of consistent preterism, J. Stuart Russell, Max R. King and his son, Tim, David Chilton, Ed Stevens, Don K. Preston, John Noe, and John L. Bray. Extreme or Consistent Preterism is heretical because it denies a bodily Second Coming of Christ.

The key to understanding Preterists is to understand how they interpret what are called the "time-texts". The time-text that they use to trump Futurists is Matt 24:34.

Matthew 24:34 "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."

What things? The things he just mentioned in verses 4-33. They interpret this to mean that the generation of the apostles would not pass away until all the things in verses 4-33 had taken place. This limits the fulfillment of these things to the first century. The only logical place is 70AD, the destruction of Jerusalem. Everything that's contained in verses 4-33 are tribulation events. There are hundreds of problems with their interpretation, but I'll just show you the two key problems. 1) they say that the 2nd Coming took place in 70AD. The problem with this is that verse 27, 29, 30 says that every eye will see Him and no one saw Jesus Christ in 70AD. There is not one historical account of anyone seeing Jesus return in 70AD. 2) Israel was destroyed in 70AD but Matt 24:22, 31 says that the elect of Israel will be saved not destroyed! See, their interpretations don't fit the details of the text. "this generation" refers to the generation that sees all these things. Jesus is talking in an eschatological context. He's referring to a future generation that sees all these things.

The second kind of "time-text" is found in Revelation itself. I call these passages the "eggs and tacos" texts because the two Greek words here are *eggus* and *tachos*. Turn to Rev 1:3. Here we have another "time-text".

Revelation 1:3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near [*eggus*].

Now, the Preterists are saying that because Jesus says "the time is near" that the fulfillment must be within a few years. They say, of course, it was fulfilled in 70AD. Now turn over to 2:16.

Revelation 2:16 ¹⁶ Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly [*tachos*], and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

Even though this letter has to do with the Church, preterists claim that this is Jesus' warning that He is going to come and make war against Israel through the Roman armies. This supposedly happened in 70AD, but that's not in the text. That interpretation is far too imaginative. That could never be understood from the words in this text.

Revelation 3:11 ¹¹ I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

Again, "I am coming quickly" is supposed to necessitate a 1st century fulfillment. You follow what they're doing? They are saying that these time-texts limit the fulfillment of the prophecies to the 1st century because "the time is near" and Christ is "coming quickly. But

we have to ask, “whose time perspective?” Quickly from God’s perspective or quickly from man’s perspective? Preterists only allow this to be understood from man’s perspective. We would take all these references to refer to imminence. An event that can happen at any moment. Now turn over to Rev 22:20. This is the last “time-text” in Revelation and this is the one that shows how inconsistent moderates really are.

Revelation 22:20 ²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

This text clearly refers to the Second Coming of Christ. If we are consistent with the other time-texts then we have to also say that this verse was fulfilled in the 1st century too, don’t we. But moderate preterists say, “oh no, this is talking about the future.” So, some of their “time-texts” have to be fulfilled in the 1st century but they arbitrarily choose this “time-text” and say “quickly” here means 1,900+ years. Do you see how arbitrary that is? If “quickly” necessitated 1st century fulfillment in chapter 1, 2, and 3 then why does “quickly” mean something else in chapter 22? It doesn’t fit. “Quickly” must refer to the same thing in all four texts. To be consistent we would have to take all the time-texts to be fulfilled in the 1st century and that would mean we deny the bodily 2nd Coming of Christ, and to deny the bodily 2nd Coming of Christ is heresy. Preterist Chilton radically states,

The Book of Revelation is not about the Second Coming of Christ. It is about the destruction of Israel and Christ's victory over His enemies in the establishment of the New Covenant Temple. In fact, as we shall see, the word *coming* as used in the book of Revelation never refers to the Second Coming. Revelation prophesies the judgment of God on apostate Israel. [emphasis added]<D:\teaching\Book of Revelation\commentary\htm\02120204.htm> - [8541E#8541E](tm-8541E#8541E) (Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*)

One other huge hump in the road for Preterists which is linked to the “time-texts” is the dating of the book of Revelation. To be a preterist you have to date the writing of the Book of Revelation before 70AD and this is practically impossible. The best attempt to do this was by Ken Gentry and he dates the book as early as 64-67AD. That is an unheard of date in Church History! Not one single person has ever dated the book that early until Gentry. The almost universal testimony of Church History and particularly of those closest to John is that the book was written by John the Apostle about 96AD.

So, we’ve looked at the five views of Revelation 4-19. First, we have Preterism, which means past fulfillment. This view teaches that Rev 4-19 was fulfilled in AD70 with the Fall

of Jerusalem or with the Fall of Rome in AD 476. Second, we have **Historical-Continuous**. This view teaches that Rev 4-19 describes events that are presently taking place in Church History spanning from John's day to the Second Coming of Christ. Third, we have **Idealism** which teaches that Rev 4-19 is describing spiritual truths. Good will eventually prevail over evil. Readers are being encouraged in their current trials. Fourth, we have the **Mixed** or **Smorgasbord** Approach. This view teaches a combination of the other views. You can't decide what to believe so you just borrow your favorite elements from the other systems. Lastly, we have the early and literal belief of **Futurism**. This view teaches that Rev 4-19 describes events in the future prior to the Second Coming of Christ. This is the tact we will take on the Book of Revelation

[Back To The Top](#)

Click [Here](#) to return to other lessons.

[Return to Fredericksburg Bible Church Web Site](#)