

Different views of The Revelation

Much of this text is presented over the page in a flowchart for those who find such things helpful.

The majority Christian view is that the Book of **Revelation contains a vision given by God to the apostle John**. That is why the book is in the Bible.

However, some today will say that this book was written by an early Christian to teach about God but does not come from God. It is attributed to John to boost its appeal. This is the standard **liberal-critical** approach. This approach says that the book helps us to see what early Christians believed, but some of those things are rather primitive.

Others see the book as an example of a Christian **mystical** experience of the Divine. The writer, possibly John, tried to put into words what he experienced. This approach says that the book is evocative and powerful in enabling others to encounter God.

Accepting that the vision is from God we must still decide, **does the vision describe real events?**

Some say it is not about, or mostly not about, real events, but it is a bit like a parable, a spiritual revelation intended to teach spiritual things. This is called the **Idealist** view. Those who think the book is more than a parable may still agree with many of the spiritual lessons.

The book seems to be about actual events, but **are those events recorded in chronological order, one thing after another?** Some say that the book itself gives us clues that we should see the same events being described in different ways, each time giving a different angle. This is called the **Parallelist** view and those who hold this view are less concerned about the precise order of events.

Whether the book is chronological or contains parallel accounts there is still a question of when in time do the events described take place. **Is the book mainly concerned with the past, the present or the future?** There are broadly three views:

The first option is that the book is mainly about events that were already in the past when John wrote, or were happening around that time in particular the early persecution of Christians and the fall of Jerusalem in AD70. This approach does see the book as looking forward, but mostly it is looking back and Revelation is treated a bit like an historical book in the Old Testament teaching us about God and His people in the world. It is called the **preterist** view, from the Latin *praeter* meaning past.

The remaining two views see the book as being more like Old Testament prophecy, with God revealing to John things that would happen after his time.

The second option is to see the book as being about the spread of history from the first to the second coming of Christ. This is called the **historicist** view and involves trying to relate Revelation to events in the past and today, as well as the future. A person looking at Revelation today is likely to relate it to history differently to someone who lived five hundred or a thousand years ago.

The third option is to see the book as revealing events that were and are still in the future. This is called the **futurist** view. Some suggest it means the book is only really of value for those living through the end times but who knows when the end will be? Futurists are likely to be on the lookout for "the signs of the times".

When we read the Bible we do have to interpret it, deciding what it is saying and what that means for us today. We do this with every part of the Bible but mostly we have strong clues about how to do it and the rest of the Bible to guide us. We also have a long history of Christian understanding of the Bible to measure our views against. When we come to Revelation the clues to its meaning are less obvious, the guidance of the rest of the Bible less clear, and the range of views of past believers far greater. This does not diminish the value of the book but it does mean we should tread carefully and with humility. History shows us some pretty strange views of this book, including people who have claimed that God revealed its meaning to them (heedless of the warnings in the final chapter) and it has particularly been used by cults. The passage of time has shown many of these views to be false, but that has not stopped people clinging on to their errors or coming up with new ones. "Look carefully then how you walk" (Eph. 5.15).

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If flowcharts alarm you turn over quickly where you will find the same information without boxes and arrows.

