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Revelation - Four Views (Part 2)



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In this presentation, Steve Gregg explores four main views on the book of Revelation: historicist, preterist, futurist, and idealist. While the futurist view is centered on predicting the future, the historicist view considers the book as a prophecy of the progression of history based on symbolic elements. The preterist view, on the other hand, sees the book as a prophecy that has already been fulfilled in past events like the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Lastly, the idealist view emphasizes the symbolic depiction of Christian truths in a dramatic way without focusing on specific events or history. Regardless of one's interpretation of the book of Revelation, Gregg emphasizes the importance of knowing and following Jesus and understanding the practical teachings of the Sermon on the Mount.

Transcript

Revelation is almost entirely about things still future from our point of view. All of them were future from his point of view, from John's point of view. But now they're still future, so they haven't begun to be fulfilled yet.

On this view, the first three chapters, which are the seven letters of the seven churches, pretty much have to do with things that were present in John's day, but that from chapter four on, it's all future, and still future. Now, they see the book dividing into three main segments, and these segments are defined in Revelation 119, where Jesus says in Revelation 119 to John, Write the things that you've seen, the things which are, and the things which will come to pass after these things. Now, those are the three parts.

Write what you've seen. Well, what had John seen? He saw this vision on the island of Patmos. He wrote it.

Chapter one is his writing what he has seen. Then, and write the things which are, that is, present realities in his day, which was the seven letters of the seven churches, describing the way the churches were in his day. And then the third, that's in chapters two and three, then the rest of the book belongs to the category, and the things that must take place after these things.

Now, in the Greek, the word after these things is two Greek words, meta-*tauta*. Meta means after, and *tauta* means these things. Meta-*tauta* means after these things.

And so, in Revelation 119, he says, Write what you've seen, and what is now, and the things that will happen meta-*tauta* after these things. Well, chapter four, verse one, begins with the word meta-*tauta*, after these things. I heard a voice like a trumpet, saying, Come up here, and I will show you the things that must take place meta-*tauta*, after these things.

And I was caught up into heaven, and I saw a throne, and him that was on it, and all this stuff in chapter four. And so it is believed that the meta-*tauta* part of the book begins in chapter four, and goes to the end. And this is the part that has not yet been fulfilled.

This is still future, even for us, as it was for them. There are some who believe, among futurists, there are some who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture. Some among futurists don't.

Some believe in a mid-tribulation rapture. Some believe in a post-tribulation rapture. There are some who believe in what they call a pre-wrath rapture, which is like three-quarters of the way through the tribulation.

So you have about four different positions people put the rapture in, but they're all futurists. They all believe not only the rapture, but everything in the book of Revelation after chapter four is still future. So that's futurism.

And, by the way, those who believe in the pre-trib rapture believe that John is the rapture in chapter four, verse one. When John hears the voice like a trumpet saying, come up here, and I was in heaven, they say that John being caught up in heaven is a picture of the church being caught up in heaven at the beginning of the tribulation, and that the rest of the book of Revelation covers the tribulation, the second coming, and the millennium, and the new heavens, new earth. All future.

So that is the futurist view. Not all are pre-trib, but probably most futurists in America are pre-trib, not necessarily around the world. Not so much.

Now, one very great characteristic of the futurist view is that it takes a literal interpretation as much as possible. Futurists, especially dispensationalist futurists, believe that we're not really doing the right thing to take the book of Revelation symbolically. And they feel like they hold the higher moral ground by taking it more literally.

And so they argue that, you know, when a third of the ocean turns to blood, and a third of the fish die, and a third of the ships sink, and so forth, that's literally going to happen to a third of the oceans of the world at some point. When you read about 100 pound hailstones coming down on the earth, there's going to be literally a hailstone shower with

100 pound hailstones. And so they argue for this literalness of it.

And they consider that they are the best interpreters because they alone do that. All the other interpretations take these things symbolically. But what's interesting is that even the futurists take most of the book of Revelation symbolically.

They don't know it. They just don't think about it. Like the beast with seven heads and ten horns.

They think that's a man. They think it's going to be a future world dictator. But if it is, it's not a beast.

It's not got seven heads or ten horns. Everyone knows that's symbolic. In fact, the book of Revelation itself says the seven heads represent seven mountains and seven kings and the ten horns.

Later you read of their ten kings. We're not even talking about a man here. We're talking about a political complex.

Kings and kings. And yet it's all symbolic. A horn is not a king.

A beast is not a man. And there's another beast that's got a mouth like a dragon and horns like a lamb. And it's another beast, the second beast.

And most people think that's a man too. But it's not described as a man. It's described as a beast.

Jesus is described as a lamb with seven eyes and seven horns. And I don't know anyone who thinks Jesus really looks like that. Nor should they.

Even Jesus returning on a white horse in chapter 19 is often recognized to be symbolic. Since we don't know if there's horses in heaven. He didn't leave on a horse.

And he's going to come back the same way he came. The same way he left according to the angels in Acts chapter 1. He's going to return in the same manner. And so there's symbolism apparently.

Even when the first four seals are broken you see four horses. One's a white horse. One's a red horse.

One's a black horse. One's a green horse. And the riders on these horses are symbolic for things.

In fact, you can clearly see it when you get to the fourth horse because the rider is death riding on the horse. Personified as a man riding a horse. Death.

And then you've got Hades there following another man named Hades. Well, Hades and

death are not men. They are concepts or places or something but they are not men.

They don't ride on horses. And actually I don't know anyone who really believes the four horses really are four literal horses. Most of them say, well, this one represents the Antichrist.

This one represents war. This one represents famine. They recognize this is symbolism.

And why not? It's apocalyptic literature. The only thing is that everybody takes much of the book of Revelation symbolically. It's just that futurists take some things literally that other people don't.

And then they congratulate themselves that they've taken the higher moral ground because they're taking a more literal approach. But really, the things they take literally are chosen almost arbitrarily as opposed to things they don't take literally. And the things they don't take literally, they still say they take literally.

Because they've been taught this is the literal interpretation of the book of Revelation. But when you say, what about the beast? Well, it's not a beast. It's a person but it represents.

But when they say represents, it's not literal. A symbol represents something. This is symbolic.

Just like all apocalyptic literature. Haman and Mordecai were not two dragons but they were in Mordecai's dream. Esther is not a river but she was in Mordecai's dream.

This is apocalyptic imagery. Very common. And so, the dispensational view especially but all futurists tend to be able to take some things more literally.

And that's really, I think, one of the advantages of the view at one level. Because we tend to take things literally. And you're going to basically be able to convince more people of futurism if they tend to take things literally.

And Westerners do. Modern Westerners don't read apocalyptic literature as a rule. And we do tend to be more literalistic.

It's sort of a Western way of thinking, a Greek way of thinking that we've picked up in our culture. And therefore, you know, if someone says, well, the Bible says literally 100 pound hailstones are going to come from the air. Well, it doesn't say literally 100 pound hailstones.

It says 100 pound hailstones. It doesn't say literally. The question is, is it literal or is it not literal? Let's not beg the question here.

And many times these commentators from the futurist view, they say, the Bible literally

says that the ocean's going to all turn to blood. Well, it says the ocean's going to turn to blood. But it doesn't say that that's literal.

The question is, is it? That's something that has to be decided on other considerations. The book of Revelation doesn't anywhere in it say literally. That's what the futurist commentators add to it.

Because they know that Western readers trying to make sense of something are more likely to be impressed by someone taking a literal interpretation of something. But a reader in the first century wouldn't have been more impressed with that. Say, what are you talking about? Don't you know the kind of literature you're looking at here? And so anyway, one of the strengths of the futurist view is it does appeal to our tendency to take things literally.

But that might not really be a strength at all. It is also widely held in top by respected men. Great men.

And I really think this is probably one of the biggest drawbacks to anyone even questioning the futurist view. If it's wrong, how can my pastor so-and-so be so wrong? My pastor so-and-so has built his whole ministry on teaching the futurist view of Revelation. And he's a great man.

He's a great teacher. Well, I won't deny that he may be a great man and a great teacher. Great men and great teachers can be wrong about things.

And if they build their entire ministry on something that's controversial, they take a great risk of their whole ministry being wrong. I don't think people should build a whole ministry on something so controversial as that. Because if they're wrong, then their whole ministry is discredited.

You know, I have my own views of Revelation that I hold to. But if they're ever proven wrong, that'll just be a little tiny bit of my ministry that I have to say, Oops, I was wrong about that. Because my ministry is not all about Revelation.

It's the only book of the Bible I've written a commentary on. But it's the least important book to my thinking. Because whatever Revelation is about, it's going to happen or did happen or whatever.

I mean, okay, I understand it or I misunderstand it. Big deal. Even if it is talking about a future tribulation of the Antichrist, what's it going to do to me good to know about it? Especially if I'm going to be raptured in chapter 4, verse 1. What do I care? And if I'm not going to be raptured, I'm going to be here anyway.

I'll recognize it soon enough when the Antichrist comes and starts wanting to laser tattoo my hand. Or put a chip in my hand. I'll say, Oh, I get it.

That was future. I recognize that. It says 666 right there.

You know, I know what that's about. You know, why do I need to know in advance? I can recognize the devil's work when it shows up. You know, I get phone calls on the radio all the time from people.

Oh, you've got to believe this future scenario that they have for Revelation. I say, OK, now you believe that. I might believe something else.

What difference does it make in my life or yours to believe one way or the other? Are you following Jesus? Am I following Jesus? So what the heck difference does it make what you think about Revelation or what I think about Revelation? You've got to be ready for it. You've got to be prepared. I'm ready.

I'm ready for anything. No, you don't expect it to be such and such. Well, I'll find out when it comes, won't I? I mean, you can expect whatever you want.

But you know what I have found? I've been a Christian for 50 years. A lot of people haven't been Christians that long. They're very gullible about these things.

Oh, the four blood moons. That's definitely the end of the world. Yeah, do you know in 1970 when I was 16, Hal Lindsey said that the generation that saw Israel become a nation had to be still living when the end of all things occurred.

And that Israel became a nation in 1948. So he said a generation is 40 years. So by 1988 it all has to run its course.

And you've got to have a seven-year tribulation before the end and the rapture before that. So you've got to have the rapture no later than 1981. And Hal Lindsey in a television interview said, you know, the rapture's got to happen in 1981.

He says, I'm making that prediction right now. He said, I'm either a hero or a bum. He says, we'll know in 1981.

Sure enough, he's right about that. Now we know. But the thing is, the people who take the future's view keep being wrong.

So even if I hold the future's view, it doesn't tell me anything for sure. Because whatever I think is going to happen, I might be as wrong as everyone else has been so far. After all, every future has been wrong so far who thought they were living in the last days.

You know, we're not the first decade of Christians to think that, you know, the book of Revelation is being fulfilled before our very eyes. There's been many generations of Christians who thought exactly the same thing. And I'm not trying to say it can't happen in our time.

I'm saying, gee, I believe Jesus could come today. That's my conviction. I believe Jesus could come today.

I'm ready. Are you? And whether I know about the future or not is not going to make a hill of beans difference in the way I live my life. Or whether I'm ready to meet Jesus.

Or whether I'm ready to suffer persecution. You know, when I was a totally convinced futurist about Revelation, I was still ready to die a martyr. In fact, I wanted to go to Russia back when it was the USSR and I wanted to preach in the underground church and hopefully get caught.

When I was a teenager, I wanted to go and be a martyr. I thought, boy, there's nothing greater than that. To die for Jesus.

I mean, I believed in a pre-trib rapture, but I was still ready to die a martyr if necessary. I mean, why not? You got to die some way. What better way, you know? So, I mean, in other words, knowing the future doesn't make any difference in the way a Christian should live their life.

If I knew Jesus was coming tomorrow, I'd live my life today the same way I lived it today. If I think he's not going to come back for a thousand years, I'll still live my life the same way as if I think he's coming next week. What should I do different? In other words, while I'm not saying the futurist view must be wrong, I'm saying that the belief that we must know what the future holds is a wrong attitude, I think.

The futurist view of Revelation could be right. But the idea that it has to be right, and I need to know, is something I just have no sympathy with. I just think, why is that so awful? Why is a whole ministry built on predictions about the future, which are not any more likely to be correct than the predictions that were made 20 years, 40 years, 100 years ago, by the same people reading the same book, making the same predictions about their own day? Maybe someone's going to get it right someday, but how do I know it's us? How about if I just live my life for Jesus and don't worry too much about speculative things about the future? Now, if you're all into the future, that's fine.

I mean, that's your business. I'm telling you, my attitude is a little different about it, and it doesn't carry a lot of weight with me when someone says, oh, you've got to be ready for the Antichrist thing. I thought you said I'm going to be raptured before then.

Anyway, I said, why do I even have to know who the Antichrist is? I don't even have to care. But it is widely held by respected teachers. What many people don't know is it's only been widely held for a very short time.

And those teachers were trained in it, by teachers who were trained in it, by teachers who were trained in it, by teachers from denominations that officially hold this doctrine called Dispensationalism in most cases. And that view arose in 1830. Now, Futurism

didn't.

Dispensationalism is a certain brand of Futurism that most Futurists hold to today, but not all. Dispensationalism arose in 1830, but Futurism rose earlier than that. Because the Historicist view, remember I said the Historicist view was the Protestant view for so long.

Why was it called the Protestant view? The Historicist view teaches and taught that the papacy is the beast. We'll talk about that in a moment. But, because the Reformers were all Historicists, and they all taught that the papacy, the Popes, are the beast.

This kind of made the Pope look bad in their preaching. And so, there was a Jesuit named Francisco Ribera in the late 1500s. Francisco Ribera, a Spanish Jesuit priest.

And he was concerned about the Protestant teaching that the Pope was the Antichrist. And so, he wrote a commentary on Revelation and said, no, no, the Pope's not the Antichrist. The Antichrist is a man who's going to rise in the end times, in the last three and a half years, in a future tribulation.

He's going to be an individual, not an institution. He's going to be a world dictator. He's going to be a persecutor of the people of God.

And he's going to be an individual Antichrist, and Jesus is going to destroy him when he comes. That's what Francisco Ribera wrote to redefine the Antichrist from being the Pope to being something that hadn't yet arrived. This was the beginning of the Futurist view, and everyone who studies it knows this.

Many Futurists know this. Francisco Ribera is the founder of the Futurist view in the late 1500s. No Protestant would touch that view with a ten-foot pole for about two or three hundred years.

Because they saw it as a Catholic view, which was invented simply to rehabilitate the image of the Pope. And Protestants weren't interested in playing that game, and so Protestants refused to get into the Futurist view. What happened is in the year 1827, a man, technically Protestant, his name was Samuel Maitland, he was the librarian to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Archbishop of Canterbury is to the Church of England what the Pope is to the Church of Rome. And the Church of England is technically Protestant, although they're Catholic in all ways except the Pope. They've got their Archbishop of Canterbury instead of the Pope, but their doctrines are essentially Roman Catholic in most other respects.

Now, Samuel Maitland was the librarian to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and he read Francisco Ribera's stuff and thought, that sounds good to me. And he wrote, as the first Protestant, hundreds of years after the death of Ribera, he promoted Ribera's Futurist view in Protestant circles. Only a few years later, in 1830, three years later, John Nelson

Darby in England, in the Plymouth Brethren movement, incorporated the Futurist view as part of his dispensational system.

And the Futurist view was carried along with dispensationalism throughout England and America initially, where it took hold very greatly, and then to a lesser degree in other parts of the world where American missionaries went. And so today, Futurism is pretty much the big popular view among Protestants as well. But its origins are well known.

I mean, anyone who studies church history knows the name of Francisco Ribera, knows about Samuel Maitland, knows about John Nelson Darby. Once in a while I'll meet a dispensationalist who says, no, that's not true. And I say, well, you can say that if you want to.

All the historians disagree with you, and you'll disagree with yourself if you read the history. It's not controversial. There's no other theories about where it came from.

It's universally known from the church historians. Do your own research and you'll find it to be true. And you can, with the computer, the internet, you can do all this, find this out really easy.

So this is, you know, the disadvantages of the Futurist view, first of all, is it makes the book 90% irrelevant to Christians. If Christians agree with the rapture in chapter 4, verse 1, then the rest of the book we might as well not even read it. What's it matter? It's irrelevant to us.

Also, it makes it irrelevant to the original readers. A strange thing to write an epistle to suffering Christians in the first century and tell them about things that will happen 2,000 years later than their time. Well, that's real comforting.

Thanks. Also, the view does not adequately recognize the symbolic character of the apocalyptic literature. Now, there's some statements in the book that Futurism really has a hard time with.

They might say they don't, but they do. Look at Revelation chapter 1, verse 1. Revelation 1.1 says, Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants things which must shortly take place. Shortly, these things are going to take place, he said, to people living 2,000 years ago.

The Futurist says, well, they haven't happened yet. So these things were really 2,000 years off. Look at verse 3, chapter 1, verse 3. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and keep those things that are written in it.

The time is near. These things are shortly going to take place. The time is near.

He's writing to people who are now dead for 2,000 years, but who are alive receiving this

message and this word of encouragement. Was he talking about something 2,000 years off and saying it was about to happen? It's near? It's shortly going to take place? Then look at chapter 22. Chapter 22, very interesting, verse 10.

It says, And the angel said to me, John says, Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. Well, we've heard already the time is at hand, but he said don't seal the words of the prophecy of this book. This is directly in contrast to Daniel, chapter 12, where Daniel said, What are the end of these all things? And the angel said, Don't worry about Daniel.

You're going to die. You're going to live to be old. You're going to die.

In the end times, you'll be raised in a near estate. But he said, Seal it up. It's not for your generation to worry about.

Seal up the words of the prophecy, Daniel was told. John is told, Don't seal up the words of the prophecy. The time is near.

Now, I mean, it's very clearly a contrast. Daniel's prophecies were not going to be quickly fulfilled, so he's told to seal the book up and put it away for a while. Another generation would benefit from it.

John is told, Don't you dare seal this book. It's coming now. It's near.

And therefore, there's this note of urgency throughout the book. In fact, I mentioned Revelation 1.19, where the three parts of the book, write what you've seen, the things that are now. The third, actually, in the Greek says, and the things that are about to take place after these things.

Actually, the Greek word is mello, M-E-L-L-O. It means about to take place, about to, is what it means. It says, write the things that are about to take place.

So, certainly, John has the impression and gives the impression, and it's the angel speaking to him that gives him that impression, that these are things that will shortly take place. The time is at hand. Don't seal the book up.

It's near. It's about to happen. Now, people who hold to the future's view really have to do something with verses like that, because they're saying it wasn't about to happen.

It was 2,000 years off. Now, of course, the easiest answer that you usually hear about this is, well, you know, a day to the Lord is like 1,000 years, and 1,000 years is like a day. So, really, even though it's 2,000 years off, it's really only a couple days off as far as God's... God wasn't lying when He said the time is near.

It's only two days, like a day is 1,000 years. Now, my answer is this. If the book was written to God, then it could use His time period to communicate its message.

However, if it's written to God, even a million years would be near. If we're saying it's near as God reckons time it's near, you might as well say nothing at all about the time, because as God reckons time, 5 million years might be near. It tells us nothing about when it's going to be fulfilled.

Why all these references to when it's going to happen, when it's really some indistinct, almost infinitely large distance in time? It's more confusing to say anything about it at all. Why not just say these things are going to someday happen? Why keep saying it's about to happen, it's surely going to take place? Don't seal the book. Time is near.

This is not written to God, it's written to people. And people do not think of 2,000 years as a short time. And if a suffering church is given information, don't worry, these things are going to happen soon.

And they're comforting things. And they die and go to heaven and say, it's 2,000 years off, sorry, I thought you'd know that. I don't think they would know that.

Now, some futures say, well, shortly doesn't mean shortly, like soon. Shortly means quickly. And they say, it doesn't mean it's going to happen soon from John's point of view, but when it does happen, it'll happen in a quick, rapid way.

Well, that is true about the word shortly. The word shortly can mean quickly. But there's too many other words used, too, that don't mean quickly, like the time is near, and it's about to take place.

I mean, that doesn't use that word. But let's face it, there's a strong emphasis on the immediacy of the fulfillment given throughout the book. And the futures view does not really do adequate justice to that.

Let's talk about the historicist view now. As I said, the historicist view holds that the book of Revelation covers all of church history from John's day to the second coming of Christ. It holds to a principle called a year for a day principle.

That means that when you find a number of days mentioned, it really means that same number of years. Now, why would you think that? Well, there's a couple things in the Old Testament they base that on. They say, when Israel sent the spies into the land to spy out the land of Canaan, they were there for 40 days.

When the people rebelled against God, God said, I'm going to give you 40 years wandering in the wilderness, a year for a day. Well, that's true. Of course, that doesn't exactly translate into a principle of interpretation of prophecy, since there were no prophecies involved and no interpretation involved.

I mean, so God made their wandering in the wilderness a year correspond to each day that they spied. That hardly gives us a principle to interpret prophecy by. The other one

is that in Ezekiel, I think it's in chapter 4 or 5, Ezekiel is told to lie on his side.

On one side he lies for a certain number of days, and on the other side he lies for another certain number of days, and these, he is told, represent the years of judgment on Israel and Judah. So there we actually do have a day representing a year. But that's the only time in any of the prophetic books that we have that, and there's many time periods in the Bible that are not taken that way.

But according to the historicist's view, the numbers in the book of Revelation are taken that way. So you've got the beast, this is the most important one, the beast's blasphemies continue for 1260 days. Now, literal days, that would be three and a half years.

But on a year for a day principle, that's 1260 years. Now, if the papacy is the beast, as historicists all generally believe, and the papacy really rose, most people identify it beginning with Pope Gregory the Great, around the year 600, then 1260 years from then would be like 1860. And so around the middle 1800s, Protestants, who were historicists, started looking for the immediate second coming of Christ.

One of those was William Miller, and the Millerites, who actually, he set a date, I think it was in the 1840s, he set as a date that he felt that Jesus would be coming back, and his followers went up on a mountain and waited for Jesus. Didn't happen. And when it didn't happen, they called that the Great Disappointment.

That's actually, church history refers to that Millerite Disappointment as the Great Disappointment. From that movement eventually arose the movement under L. N. G. White, which was the Seventh-day Adventist movement. And they are pretty much the only people around today who still seem to hold the historicist view of Revelation.

The reason that most have abandoned it is twofold. One is that most got sucked up in the futurist view and gave up the historicist view. And, you know, once you hold the futurist view, you can't hold the historicist view anymore.

I think the disappointment was the problem. You know, when the papacy didn't fall in 1860, or anywhere thereabouts, it tended to look like there were some flaws with the view. Also, this view holds that the seven seals are the fall of the Western Empire of Rome to the barbarian invasions, that the seven trumpets are the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire to the Saracens and the Turks, and that the seven bowls of judgment in chapter 16 are a reference to the French Revolution.

Trouble is, once you get past the seven bowls of judgment, there's nothing left. And the French Revolution was a couple hundred years ago. So it's like we ran out of Revelation, but we didn't run out of history yet.

And so when the papacy didn't fall in the 19th century, there were many who were

disappointed. Many bailed from the historicist view, and you don't find many now. I do know some people who are not Seventh-day Adventists who do hold the historicist view, but they're very few.

And there are some groups in the United States kind of meeting around this kind of view, that the historicist view is correct still. But that's the historicist view. It is mostly a thing of the past, except pretty much in the Seventh-day Adventist revelation seminars, where they still teach that view.

So that's a second view. A third view is the preterist view. Now remember, the word preterist just means fulfilled in the past.

And most preterists today argue that it's fulfilled in the past through the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Though many preterists in earlier days applied it to the fall of Rome in the 5th century. But these people believe that this isn't going to cover all of church history, it's just going to cover this one judgment event which is now long past in early centuries of the church.

One of the advantages of this view is that it makes really good sense of those verses that we said the futures have a hard time with. When John says, these things are about to happen. This is about to take place.

This is going to happen shortly. Don't seal the book because it's at hand. These verses make a lot of good sense if it was written during the reign of Nero, who died in 68, and if its predictions are of the Jewish war, which began in 66 and ended in 70.

If that is indeed the scenario, if it was written in the reign of Nero, you can take all those messages of near fulfillment very literally. That's a literal interpretation of Revelation. Notice.

And in fact it's interesting. It's the futures who always tell us they take a literal view of Revelation, but they take the most non-literal view of these time statements. And the time statements are found in the beginning and end of the book, which are not so much symbolic.

The symbolism is mostly in the visions. The statements about the near fulfillment are in the first three verses, the introduction, this is the revelation that was given to John, and blah blah blah about things that may shortly take place. That's before the symbolic visions even begin.

Then at the end, in the epilogue, the angel says, don't seal it up, the time is near. That's in kind of the close. The middle part is all those visions of dragons and beasts and things like that.

Now, what's interesting is that the preterist takes the beginning and the end literally,

because it's not written in symbols, and says it's shortly going to take place. They take the middle part symbolically, because it's written symbolic visions. The futurist does the opposite.

They take the visions literally, as much as they can, but then they have to take symbolically these statements about the time is near. They have to rework those. Preterism doesn't have a problem with those statements.

In fact, those statements work best for the preterist, actually. If the preterist view is true, it's relevant to the original readers. Something we would expect to find in an epistle written to original readers.

It would be something relevant to their times. Now, they weren't in Jerusalem, but the destruction of the Jewish state and the Jewish religion and the temple and the priesthood and all that was going to have tremendous impact on the relations of the church to the Jews throughout the empire, because in many cases, until that time, the Jews were persecuting the Christians. But that kind of stole their thunder, in a way.

It kind of took the wind out of their sails, and it would have a relevance to the original readers. That's why Jesus tells the church of Smyrna and the church of Philadelphia, both of which are persecuted by Jews, that he's soon going to reverse that situation for them. It also agrees impressively with Josephus' writings of the Jewish war.

Now, many people have not read Josephus. His volumes are very huge. Josephus was a Jew living in the first century who participated in that war.

He was a general, a Jewish general, in the Jewish war. Early in the war, he was captured by the Romans. When he began to see the massive force of the Romans, he knew Jerusalem was doomed.

He felt the only hope for the Jews is to surrender and save their lives. Same thing Jeremiah told his generation. When Jerusalem was about to be destroyed by the Babylonians, Jeremiah told his generation, surrender and you'll live.

Resist and you'll die. Well, that's what Josephus did in his generation. He told the Jews, you need to surrender.

He actually became an interpreter for Titus, the Roman general. Who conquered Jerusalem. He stood at the wall and Josephus tried to persuade the Jews to surrender so they'd live and not die.

Just like Jeremiah had done before. Well, the Jews threw rocks and hit him in the head and stuff like that. The Jews today even think of Josephus as a traitor to the Jewish cause.

But he loved the Jews. He wrote their Jewish history. He wrote something called

Antiquities of the Jews, a complete history of the Jews.

He also wrote another major work called The Wars of the Jews about the Jewish war. In great detail, he told about that three and a half year war. It's interesting how few books other than the New Testament have survived from the first century.

But Josephus' work has, interestingly enough. It might be even providential. If you were a preterist, you'd probably think so.

Because without Josephus' book, we wouldn't know what happened in the Jewish war. We don't have any other eyewitnesses who've recorded it except Josephus. But we do.

And when you read Josephus, it's amazing how many things in Josephus correspond with the predictions of Revelation. I mentioned the hundred-pound hailstones. Josephus mentioned specifically he had never read Revelation.

He was a Jew, not a Christian. He was a Jewish general. But as he's telling about the war, he says, at one stage, the Romans were using catapults, throwing hundred-pound stones over the walls and killing people inside the city.

He said, because the stones were easily seen, because they were dark against the day sky, they painted the stones white and threw them. He said, each stone weighed about a hundred pounds. Now, he didn't know that Revelation talked about a judgment involving hundred-pound hailstones pelting the city.

But he kind of tells a story that makes sense. You know, where Revelation a couple of times talked about the sea turning to blood, the ships sinking, the fish dying, corpses and all. Josephus didn't know about the book of Revelation, but he told about a battle that took place on the Sea of Galilee.

The Romans chased the Galilean Jews into the water. The Jews got in boats, and they went out into the Sea of Galilee to try to escape, but the Romans pursued them on boats. And they pursued them, shooting them with arrows and hacking them with swords and so forth.

Many times, the Jews would jump out of their boats and swim to the Romans, hoping for safety, to surrender. They put their hands on the boats, and the Romans would cut their hands off and cut their heads off. Josephus said, the next morning, one could see the sea all bloody with all the wrecked ships and all the swollen corpses.

And you think, whoa, that's exactly what Revelation said happened with one of those trumpets. You get this kind of stuff, it doesn't prove anything, but it's interesting. That is to say, if we didn't have Josephus, we wouldn't know whether these kinds of things had happened or not.

Because we have Josephus, and he didn't even know about the book of Revelation, we have amazing confirmations of a great number of things that the book of Revelation seems to describe. So those are advantages of the preterist view. Now, there are some disadvantages of the preterist view.

One of them is, it's totally vulnerable to the date of writing. If those who hold to the later date of writing are correct, that is, if it was written in the reign of Domitian, the preterist view doesn't work. If it was written in 96 AD, that's 25 years after the fall of Jerusalem.

Certainly, the book of Revelation would not be written prophesying an event that happened a quarter of a century earlier. The only way that the preterist view can be correct is if it was written before 70 AD. That is possible, but disputed.

It remains a matter of dispute, and that's why I went over the material earlier. There are some arguments against it, and arguments for it. And the preterist view depends 100% on the early date.

If the early date is not correct, the preterist view is not correct. The preterist view is the only view vulnerable on that point. Because all the other views could be correct, whether it was written during the reign of Nero or the reign of Domitian.

The futurists could be right, no matter when it was written. The historicists could be right, no matter when it was written. Even the idealists, as we'll find, could be right, no matter when it was written.

But the preterist cannot be right if it's written in the later date. And that's why the reign of Nero as the date of writing is so important to the preterists. It's not as important to anyone else.

Because, of course, the whole preterist view stands or falls on that date being legitimate. The other weakness of it, or what is thought to be a weakness of it, is it is said that the preterist view had a beginning similar to the futurist view by a Spanish Jesuit named Luis de Alcazar. It is true, late in the 16th century, just like Francisco Rivera wrote the first futurist view, another Jesuit named Luis de Alcazar wrote a preterist commentary on Revelation.

His teaching was that the first half of the book was fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem, and the second half of the book was fulfilled in the fall of Rome. Now, he was doing it for the same reason that Francisco Rivera was doing it. They both wanted to rehabilitate the Pope, because the historicist view of the Protestants was the dominant view among Protestants, and it was very convincing.

And therefore, to help the Pope out, and try to make it seem like the Pope isn't the Antichrist, and that the book of Revelation isn't about the Pope, just like Francisco Rivera turned the Antichrist into a future figure, Luis de Alcazar made the book of Revelation

about things earlier. Preterist. Now, some people say, well, the preterist view, then, it's got as shaky a foundation as the futurist view.

Both views were started by Jesuits trying to defend the Pope. But there's one difference here, and that is that Luis de Alcazar was not the founder of the preterist view. There were preterists long before him.

A thousand years before him, there were preterists. For example, in the 6th century, a thousand years before Alcazar, there was a Christian commentator on Revelation named Arethas. There was another one named Andreas of Cappadocia.

Both of them took a preterist view of Revelation. I've got some quotes here from Arethas. When he's commenting on Revelation 6.12, he said, Some refer this to the siege of Jerusalem by Vespasian.

Some in his day thought that Revelation 6.12, which is the sixth seal being broken, was a reference to the fall of Jerusalem, or to the siege of Jerusalem in the days of Vespasian. That's in, you know, 70 A.D. On Revelation 7.1, where the 144,000 are sealed, Arethas writes, Here then were manifestly shown to the evangelists what things were to befall the Jews in their war against the Romans in the way of avenging the sufferings inflicted upon Christ. That's a preterist view.

That this was a judgment of God on the city that had crucified Christ. And Jesus had predicted that not one stone would be left standing on another when their enemies would come. Jesus predicted that in Luke 19.

He wept over Jerusalem. He said, Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, if only you had known those things that are for your peace, but now they're hidden from your eyes. Now, he says, your enemies are going to come and cast a siege around you, and they'll level you to the ground, and your children within you, and not one stone will be left on another.

And that happened in 70 A.D. He said the same thing when he left the temple in Matthew 24, verse 2. He said, Do you see this temple? Not one stone is going to be left standing on another. It'll be all thrown down. That happened in 70 A.D. too.

So, in other words, that view of Revelation was taken by Arethas. At Revelation 7.4, Arethas wrote, quote, When the evangelists received these oracles, the destruction in which the Jews were involved was not yet inflicted by the Romans. In other words, Arethas said this was written before A.D. 70.

And he said it was about that. So, even if it is true that Luis de Alcazar wrote a preterist commentary on Revelation, he was certainly not the first. A thousand years before him, Arethas did.

And another guy, Andreas of Cappadocia, around the same time, wrote one. And so, of

course, we don't know whether preterism is true or not. It's got to be decided on a different basis than any of that.

But the truth is that while the futurist view really did arise in the late 1500s from Francisco Ribeiro, the preterist view did not originate with Luis de Alcazar. It was around a long time before he was ever born. It may not have been the original view of the early church.

For example, we read a quote from Irenaeus before our break. He apparently was not a preterist. Because he thought the Antichrist was still future and he was writing in 170.

But he thought it was coming in his day. Actually, Irenaeus believed the number 666 stood for the word Latinus, which means Roman. So Irenaeus did believe the Roman Empire was the beast.

So he would have been seen and fulfilled kind of in his time. But he lived a long time after the fall of Jerusalem and he didn't recognize it in a preterist sense. So some of the church fathers did not and some did.

Irenaeus did not. Arethas did. And Andreas did.

Now the last view to consider is the idealist view. And as I said, this view is different from the others. In that the other views try to assign a time of fulfillment of the prophecies.

Either in the future or in the past or spread out over the whole age of the church. The idealist view doesn't do that. The idealist view says, you know, there's certain timeless truths that are always true at all times.

And these visions are simply symbolic descriptions of those truths. Well, what truths? Well, truths like the sovereignty of God. Throughout the book of Revelation you see God sovereignly bringing judgment, sovereignly raising up and bringing down.

God's sovereign activity in the world is a main theme of Revelation. You say, well, that's a truth all the time. And we see that depicted in these symbolic visions.

The spiritual warfare between Christ and Satan and between the church and Satan is depicted. That's an ongoing thing for all time. It's not certain events.

It's like a reality, timeless reality. And so the idealist view holds that things like that, the sovereignty of God, the spiritual warfare, the victory of Christ over the powers of evil, the vindication of the martyrs in heaven, these things are always true. And they come up again and again in the book of Revelation.

So the view would be sort of like taking the book of Revelation to be sort of like maybe we would take Pilgrim's Progress. How many of you are familiar with Pilgrim's Progress? You should be. It's the most widely read book in the world besides the Bible.

John Bunyan wrote it. He was a Puritan writer. He wrote it in jail because it was illegal in England in his day to preach the gospel outside of church.

He was outside of church preaching the gospel. He went to jail. While he was in jail, he wrote a book called Pilgrim's Progress, which, as I say, is the bestselling book in the world besides the Bible and should be.

It's an incredible book. It begins, I dreamed, and I saw a man with a burden on his back. And he seemed to be very disturbed and very despondent.

And he talked about this man, how this man was visited by somebody named Evangelist, who brought him a scroll. And he saw the gospel. He said, go to this wicked gate and go through there and you'll find a cross there.

You go to the cross and your burden will fall off your back. And so he went through there. He had to go through the slew of despond.

And, you know, one of his companions that started out with him, pliable, started going with him, but turned back from the slew of despond. And after he got through the past the cross, he took the path to the celestial city. And he met worldly wise man and Mr. Legalist.

And he met all these people, none of whom are real people. The story is not historical, but no one can have any trouble seeing what it's teaching. Everyone in it symbolizes some spiritual truth.

And the book is an incredibly profound allegory of the Christian life. Totally edifying. If you haven't read it, shame on you.

Get it and read it. The Pilgrim's Progress. When you do, you'll see a book that's similar to what the idealists think about the book of Revelation.

The idealists think this is not talking about a true story. It's not talking about specific events. It's talking about Christian truths that are depicted in these dramatic ways.

That Christ is the victor. That Satan is the loser. That there's a spiritual warfare between Christians and the devil.

And they triumph over him by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony. And they love not their lives to the death. And when they die, as far as they're victorious in heaven, reigning on thrones with Christ.

Blah, blah, blah, blah. All this. Now, see, this is the idealist view.

This doesn't look for any kind of fulfillment of anything in the book of Revelation. It's more seeing the spiritual lesson behind everything. Now, what would be the advantage

of this view? Well, one advantage would be that it avoids the difficulty of harmonizing the visions with anything historic.

Either future or past. And therefore, it doesn't have to be very specific about connecting things with history. Because it doesn't claim any such connections.

But the real disadvantage of the idealist view is that in Revelation 1.1 it says, This is a prophecy about things that may shortly come to pass. Actual events, apparently. Things that must take place after this.

In other words, the book of Revelation itself says it is a prophecy about events that are going to happen. It says they'll happen shortly. And the time is at hand.

So, the idealist view doesn't recognize that and seems to be mistaken on that point. So, what do we do? Each view has some strengths and some weaknesses. Each view, by the way, is held by a great number of Christians.

You know how many people hold the futurist view. It's probably the view you hold. You know how many people were Protestants in the days of the Reformation.

They held the historicist view. And some people still hold it today. The preterist view, if you haven't heard it before, it's a growing view, too.

In fact, most of the new writers on Revelation are probably promoting that. And it's causing real consternation among futurists. And they're writing books against it.

But the idealist view, it's been around a long time, too. But it's been very popular among certain British evangelicals since the 1940s, especially. But it's been around longer.

You can find elements of it centuries ago in writings of church fathers. But all the views have been around for some time now. And all of them have people who are very smart, godly, evangelical, orthodox Christians who hold them.

It's obvious that there's not one view that just holds the monopoly on all the smart Christians hold this view. Or all the people who really know their Bibles hold this view. Or all the people who really are uncompromising hold these views.

All these views are held by people who are very uncompromising, Bible scholars who love the Lord, who are conservative in their theology. But these views have been around. All of them have been around.

It's just that we live in this little bubble here where we've only lived for less than 100 years. And during that 100 years, the futurist view has been the popular view in America, primarily. You go to England, most of the evangelical scholars hold the idealist view, not the futurist view.

Canada also, I think. But the thing is here, it's a mistake to say, well, I'm going to hold this view because the people I respect hold it. I think it's better to say, I'm going to look into this until I can reach some convictions of my own about it.

And if I disagree with somebody, I'm not going to make that a federal case. It doesn't have to be a big deal. Who cares? I mean, if I decide to be an idealist or a preterist or a historicist, and someone else says, no, I think the future is true, more power to you.

Does that have to have any impact on our fellowship or our Christian walk? I can't see how it would. And by the way, I think many people are reaching the conclusion, I'm one of them, that the correct view is probably a combination of more than one. I will say this.

The idealist view, though it's different than the others, is different in a way that it could be mixed with any of the others. You could be a futurist and still hold an idealist view. You could be a historicist or a preterist and still hold an idealist view.

Because you could say, these things really do have a fulfillment in events. But they also, in the sovereignty of God, they illustrate these truths that the idealists think are there. Because they are there.

So, I mean, you could kind of mix things up a bit. My own view, I don't say so in my book. You've read my whole book and not know my view.

But I'd let you in on my little secret, because it's not really that much of a secret. I say it on the air. My view is partially preterist and partially idealist.

But, you know, I know good people who are all idealists. Some who are all partially preterists. I know some who are all futurists.

And some who are historicists, too. I have some historicist friends, because I have some Seventh-day Adventist friends. But it doesn't really make an awful lot of difference which view is correct if you're following Jesus.

If you're not following Jesus, it still won't do you any good to have the correct view. So, you know, having the correct view or the incorrect view won't make a difference if you're following Jesus. And it won't make a difference to you if you're not.

If you're not following Jesus, having the right view of Revelation isn't going to help you. If you are following Jesus, having a mistaken view of Revelation probably isn't going to hurt you too much. The Church got along for 300 years before it was in the canon of Scripture.

The Church still survived without any official view on the book of Revelation. But it's fascinating, and I believe, you know, the Bible says in Proverbs, it's the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the honor of kings is to search out a matter. And so having said all

that I've said about, ah, it doesn't really matter what view you take, I still think I'd rather know what's true than not, and so I'm going to still search.

It's just not going to be the main focus of my search. There's things more important than my understanding of Revelation, I believe, that following Jesus. I think understanding the Sermon on the Mount has a lot more to do with the way we live than understanding the book of Revelation.

And I think a lot of people who are really immersed in the book of Revelation and speculation and stuff, they're really kind of ignoring the Sermon on the Mount in a big way. So, I mean, some things are practical, and those things we're going to be held accountable for. Things that are theoretical or abstract, there's some benefit in knowing them, I'm sure.

But I don't think we're going to be held that much responsible. The Bible says that when we're judged, it says this in Revelation, we're going to be judged according to our works, not by our opinions about Revelation. So when you get to the pearly gates, if you believe in such pearly gates, and Peter's there, if you believe Peter's going to meet you there, he's not going to say, okay, your name, rank, serial number, and view of Revelation.

If you check all the boxes right, you're going to get into Heaven, otherwise not. Your view of Revelation has nothing to do with how you're going to get to Heaven. So, you might say, but now I'm confused.

Let me give you a little bit of, we're going to close right now because it's 9.30, we're going to close by this, you don't have to be confused. There's an option, an alternative to being confused. You can just be undecided.

I'm not confused about anything, but I'm undecided about a lot of things. Confused and undecided are two different things. Undecided means, I'm not really sure which one's right, but I'm not sweating it.

I'll keep looking into it until I know more. I'm going to keep researching it. When I know more, I'll know more.

Being confused means, I have to know and I can't figure it out. And it's like a disordered state of mind. You're ill at ease and you're freaking out.

Confused, not necessary. You can refuse to be confused. Just remain undecided until you know.

And maybe you already do know. Maybe you're not undecided. But for those who feel confused, I'd say choose undecided instead of confused.

It's a much nicer way to live. All right, let's pray. Father, I thank you for these good

people who've sat so long to listen so much.

And I believe probably in most cases they did so because they really care to know what your word teaches and want to understand, as I do, what this book is about and what every book of the Bible is about. We want to know your word and understand it. We want to live by it.

And I pray that as we go through the remainder of our lives, as we continue to study your word, that things will become clear that are not yet clear as we sit here. Some things may be really muddled in our minds at the moment, but they can become clear as we continue to wait on you, meditate day and night on your word, pray for your spirit to give us enlightenment, and live contented with what you're willing to show us now and wait, patient to wait for what you want to show us in the future. And I pray that your Holy Spirit will superintend our thinking on all these things and lead us into all truth as Jesus promised.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.