

A Case for the Futurist Interpretation of the Book of Revelation



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Preterism Advocates

Recent Preterist Commentators

- R.C. Sproul



- N.T. Wright



- Scott Hahn



- J. Massyngbaerde Ford



- David Chilton



- Hank Hanegraaff



- Kenneth Gentry



Partial Preterism's View of Revelation

- Written in mid A.D. 60's
- Mostly fulfilled in A.D. 70
- Predicts A.D. 70 sacking of Jerusalem as God's divorce and judgment of adulterous Israel
- Rev 20 describes a future bodily return of Christ



Key Concepts

1. Hermeneutics

2. “Time texts”

3. Theme verse (Rev 1:7)

4. Relevance to the seven churches (Rev 2–3)

5. God’s divorce decree (Rev 5)

6. The 144,000 (Rev 7)

7. The temple (Rev 11)

8. The woman in the wilderness (Rev 12)

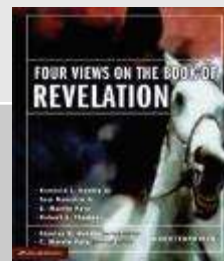
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10. Babylon (Rev 17–18)

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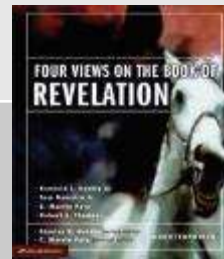
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Hermeneutics

- **Preterist** = Hyperbole based on Apocalyptic literature
- **Futurist** = Normal, literal, consistent



Literal Interpretation

One Meaning

Plain Literal

The literal interpretation is the explicit assertion of the words—DENOTATIVE

Figurative Literal

The literal interpretation is the specific intention of the figure—CONOTATIVE

Chart by Earl Radmacher

Revelation's Symbols and Figures of Speech

- “Spiritually” (11:8)
- “Sign” (12:1)
- “Like” or “as” (8:8)
- OT correspondence (Rev 13:2; Dan 7)
- Contextual interpretations (17:18)



Assigning Meaning to Revelation's Symbols and Figures of Speech

- Context (Rev 12:3, 9)
- Old Testament (Rev 12:1; Gen 37:9-10)
- Comparison (Rev 8:8)



Artwork by P.M. Marwicko Smith 01/02, 1992
www.revelationillustrated.com

GLOBAL EVENTS YET TO OCCUR

- ☒ World population destroyed (Rev. 6:8; 9:15)
- Sea turns to blood (Rev. 16:3)
- Greatest Earthquake in history (Rev. 16:18)
- The great city that reigns over the entire earth (Rev. 17:18)

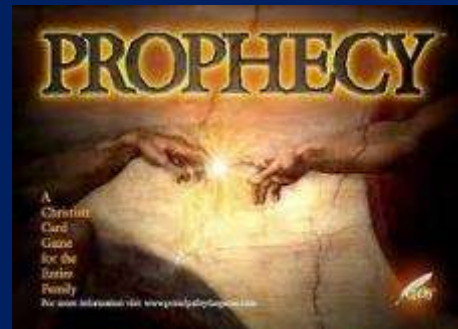
Apocalyptic Books

- *Enoch*
- *Apocalypse of Baruch*
- *Jubilees*
- *Assumption of Moses*
- *Psalms of Solomon*
- *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*
- *Sibylline Oracles*



Emergent Eschatology and Genre

“The book of Revelation is an example of popular literary genre of ancient Judaism, known today as Jewish apocalyptic. Trying to read it without understanding its genre would be like watching *Star Trek* or some other science fiction show thinking it was a historical documentary...instead of being a book about the distant future, it becomes a way of talking about the challenges of the immediate present.”

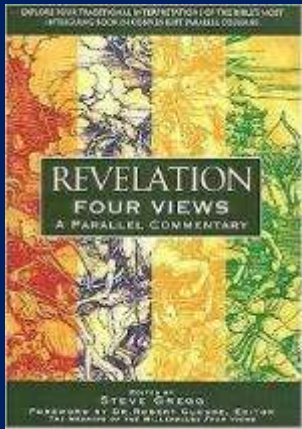


Brian McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus*, 175-76

Steve Gregg

Revelation: Four Views, 11

“Another obvious similarity between the Apocalypse and its uninspired counterparts is the use of vivid images and symbols...in depicting the conflict between good and evil. A failure to take in to account this feature has led some to the most outlandish teachings on this book by some whose rule of interpretation is ‘literal unless absurd.’ Though this is a good rule when dealing with literature written in a literal genre, it is the exact opposite in the case of apocalyptic literature, where symbolism is the rule and literalism is the exception.”



G. B. Caird

The Language and Imagery of the Bible
(London: Duckworth, 1980), 253.

The Language and Imagery of the Bible

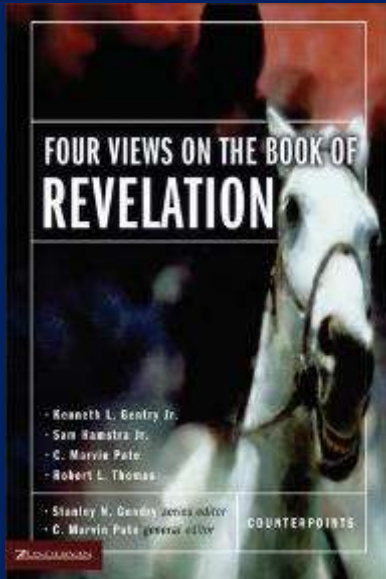


G.B.Caird

J.B. Caird best summarizes the matter when he says, "What seems to have escaped notice at the time is that Eschatology is a metaphor, the application of end of the world language to that which is not literally the end of the world."

Kenneth Gentry

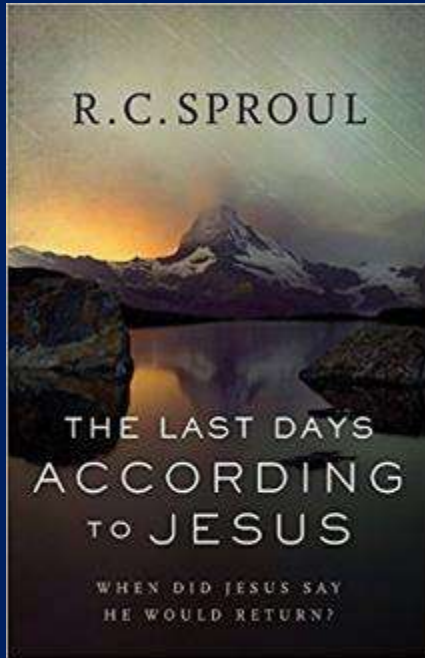
Four Views of Revelation, p. 38.



“...the preterist view does understand Revelation’s prophecies as strongly reflecting actual historical events in John’s near future, though they are set in apocalyptic drama and clothed in poetic hyperbole.”

Sproul

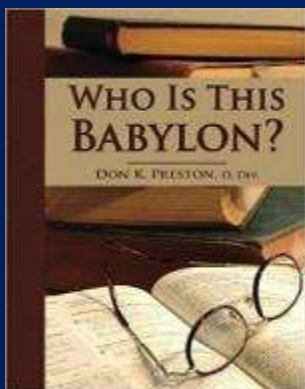
The Last Days According to Jesus, 45.



“Russell and Calvin agree that the language employed in biblical prophecy is not always cold and logical as is common in the western world, but adopts a kind of fervor common to the East.”

Don Preston

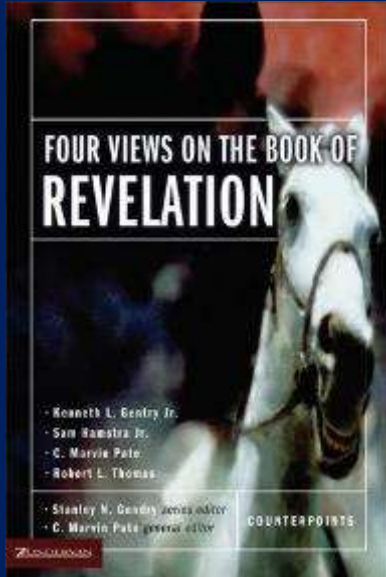
Who Is This Babylon? (Don K. Preston, 1999), 56.



Preterist Don Preston also relies upon Revelation to belonging to the apocalyptic category in order to find support for his view that Revelation's global language was fulfilled in the local events of A.D. 70. He observes that apocalyptic literature hyperbolizes the destruction of Jerusalem. According to *Sibylline Oracle* 5:153, “the whole creation was shaken” when war began on Jerusalem. If Revelation is also apocalyptic literature, then Revelation must be similarly using hyperbolic language.

Robert Thomas

*“A Classical Dispensationalist View of Revelation,” in
Four Views of the Book of Revelation, p.181.*



“A Preterist approach must assume an apocalyptic genre in which the language only faintly and indirectly reflects the actual events. This extreme allegorical interpretation allows for finding fulfillments in the first-century Roman Empire prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.”

Apocalyptic Genre Versus Revelation

Adapted from Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, 338

APOCALYPTIC GENRE

REVELATION

Pseudonymous

Not pseudonymous

Pessimistic about the present

Not pessimistic about the present

No epistolary framework

Epistolary framework

Limited admonitions for moral compliance

Repeated admonitions for moral compliance

Messiah's coming exclusively future

Basis for Messiah's coming is past

Does not call itself prophecy

Calls itself prophecy

Vaticina ex eventu

Futuristic prediction

Primarily concerns a future generation (1 Enoch 1:2)

Concerns both the present generation of the author (Rev 2–3) and a future generation (Rev 4–22)

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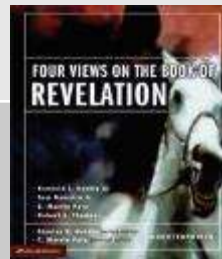
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“Time Texts”

- Preterist = chronological
- Futurist = adverbial, qualitative, imminent



"TIME-TEXTS" IN REVELATION

R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus*, p.139

SHORTLY, QUICKLY "*Tacos*"

1:1	...Things which must shortly take place
2:16	Repent, or else I will come to you quickly.
3:11	Behold, I come quickly!
22:6	...Which must shortly take place.
22:7	Behold, I come quickly!
22:12	Behold, I am coming quickly!
22:20	Surely, I am coming quickly!

NEAR, AT HAND "*Eggus*"

1:3	The time is near.
22:10	The time is at hand.

ABOUT TO, ON THE POINT OF "*Mellw*"

1:19	Write...the things that are about to take place.
3:10	...the hour of trial...is about to come upon the whole world.

Chronological Versus Adverbial Use of *Tacos*

- “I hope to come to you *soon*” (1 Tim 3:14) vs. “Leave Jerusalem *quickly*” (Acts 22:18)

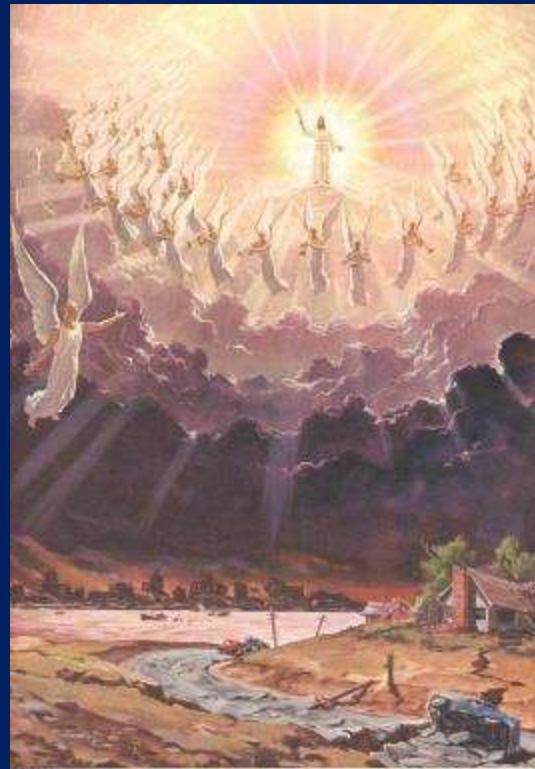
- LXX

- ◆ Isaiah 13:22: “Her fateful time also will *soon* come”
- ◆ Isaiah 51:5: “My righteous is *near*, My salvation has gone forth, And my arms will judge the peoples; The coastlands will wait upon me, And on My arms they will trust.”



Imminency

- Eggys: “The Lord is *near*” (Phil 4:5)
- Mellō: “and one who will share in the glory to be revealed” (1 Pet 5:1)



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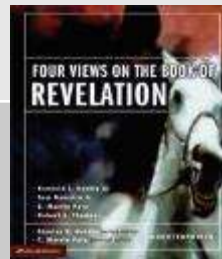
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Theme Verse (Rev. 1:7)

- **Preterist** = destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70; spiritual/ invisible coming
- **Futurist** = future, literal/ bodily coming

“Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him.”



Preterists' 3 Comings of Christ

Incarnation

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graph TD; A[Incarnation] --> B[A.D. 70]; B --> C[Bodily Return];
```

A.D. 70

Bodily Return

Preterist Key Words (Rev 1:7)

- **Clouds** = Isa 19:1 cloud imagery depicts non-bodily divine judgment
- **Pierced** = Jewish guilt for crucifying Christ (Acts 2:22-23)
- **Tribes** = tribes of Israel
- **Earth** (gē) = land of Israel (Matt 2:6)

Preterist Problems

- “All the Tribes of the Earth” (LXX) = “all of the nations”
 - ◆ Gen 12:3; 28:14; Ps 72:17; Zech 14:17
- “Earth” (gē) has a global meaning in other contexts
 - ◆ Gen 1:1; Matt 5:18; Rev 1:5; 21:1



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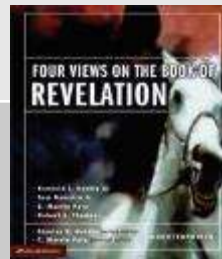
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Relevance to the 7 Churches

- **Preterist**: Revelation is irrelevant unless it happened within the generation of the seven churches
- **Futurist**: Revelation comforts the seven churches with a vision of the future

OT Prophets Comfort Through Futuristic Visions

- Isaiah 40–66
- Ezekiel 34–48
- Amos 9:11-15
- Zechariah 12–14
- Revelation 4–22



Exhortations Drawn from Revelation 20:7-15

- Smyrna - “Second death” (2:11; 20:14)
- Sardis - “Book of life” (3:5; 20:15)





“What does a localized judgment hundreds of miles away have to do with the seven churches in Asia? ...the promise to shield the Philadelphian church from judgment (3:10-11) is meaningless if that judgment occurs far beyond the borders of that city.”
– Robert Thomas, *Four Views of Revelation*, p.225

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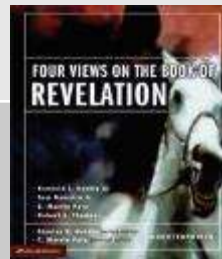
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God's Divorce Decree

- **Preterist**: The scrolls in Rev. 5 and Ezekiel 2-3 represent God's Divorce of Israel
- **Futurist**: The scrolls represent God's restoration of national Israel



Ezekiel
Commissioned
(1-3) mouth closed

Ezekiel
Recommissioned
(33) mouth opened

↓ Judgment on

↓ Blessing on

Judah (1-24)

Judah (33-48)

-Glory departs

-Glory Returns

Judgment
on
Nations
(25-32)

Source: Charles Dyer, *Notes on Ezekiel*

Abrahamic Covenant



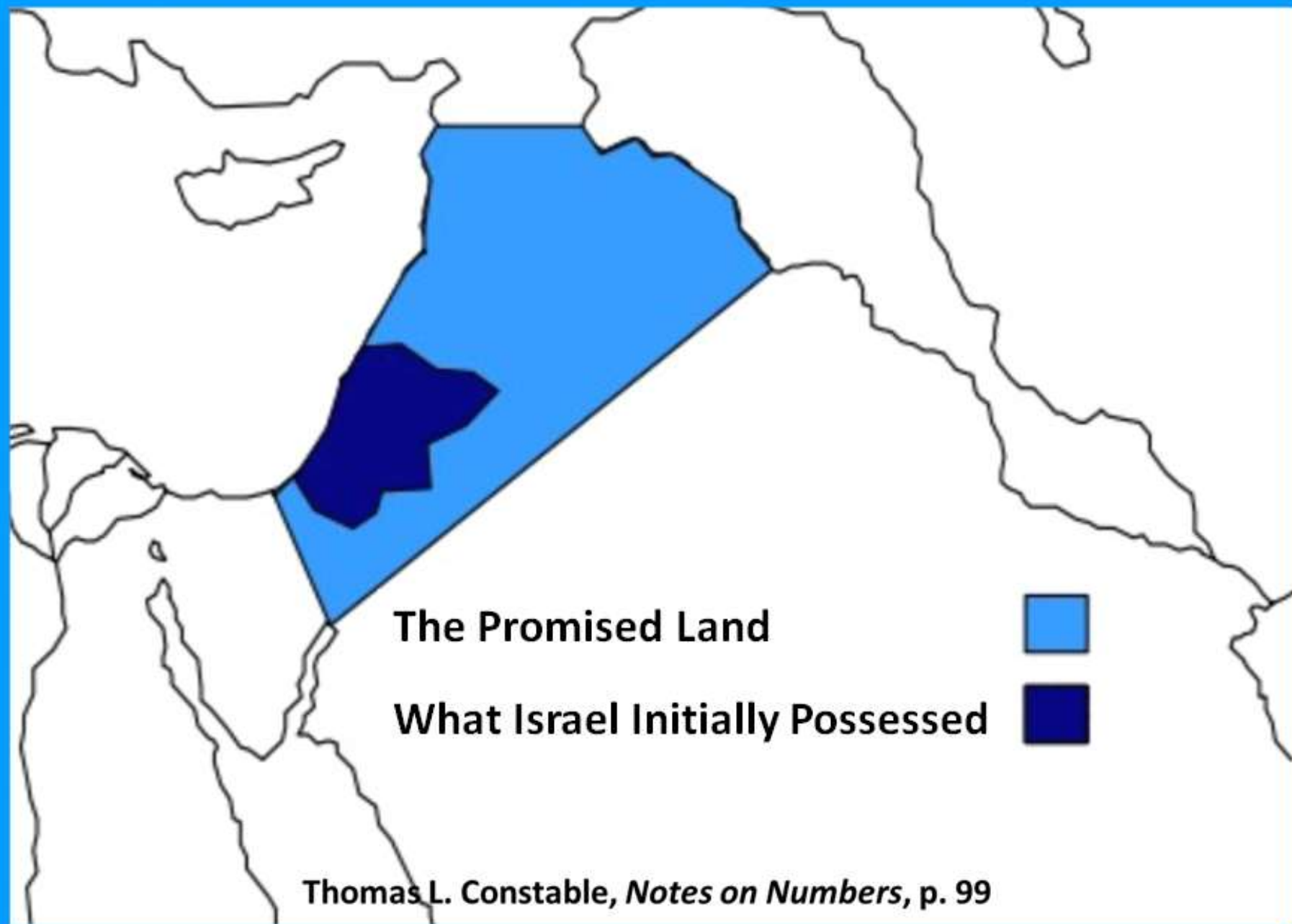
Unconditional covenant with a conditional blessing (Deut. 28; Lev. 26)

Evidence of Abrahamic Covenant's Unconditional Nature

- ANE covenant ratification ceremony (Gen 15)
- No stated conditions for Israel's obedience (Gen 15)
- Covenant's eternality (Gen 17:7, 13, 19)
- Covenant's immutability (Heb 6:13-18)
- Trans-generational reaffirmation despite perpetual national disobedience (Jer. 31:35-37)

Land Promises Fulfilled in the Time of Joshua or Solomon?

- Extended context *Josh 13:1-7*
- Land gained was a fraction of what was promised *Num. 34 vs. Gen. 15*
- Jerusalem unconquered by Joshua *Josh 15:63*
- Forever? *Gen 17:8*
- Amos 9:11-15 Reaffirms land promises



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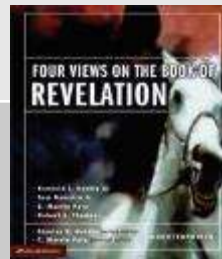
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144,000 (Rev 7)

- **Preterist**: 144,000 represents the new Israel/
Church
- **Futurist**: 144,000 represents the tribulation
period Jewish evangelists

144,000 (Rev 7)

- 144,000 v.1-8 ≠ innumerable multitude v.9-17
- OT treats the tribes as literal, historical (Gen 29–30)
- De-literalize the 144,000 (7:9)
- “Church” absent in Rev 4–22
- Global language (7:9; 5:9)
- Tribes are not lost (Jas 1:1; Acts 26:7)

Distinctions Between 144,000 & Multitude

REVELATION 7:1-8

REVELATION 7:9-17

Numbered

Innumerable

Jews

All nations

Sealed

Slain

Sealed before the
Tribulation

Converted out of the
Tribulation

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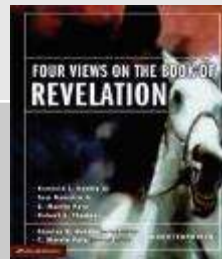
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Temple (Rev. 11)

- **Preterist:** John writing about the Herodian temple
- **Futurist:** John writing about the future 3rd /Antichrist's temple



Problems with the Herodian Temple View of Revelation 11:1-2

- A “*future*” temple vision is possible
- John was hundreds of miles away on Patmos
- Rev 11:3-13 fulfilled A.D. 70?
- A.D. 70 ends the “Times of the Gentiles”?

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Temple Visions of Daniel and Ezekiel



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Gentry

He Shall Have Dominion, 421-22



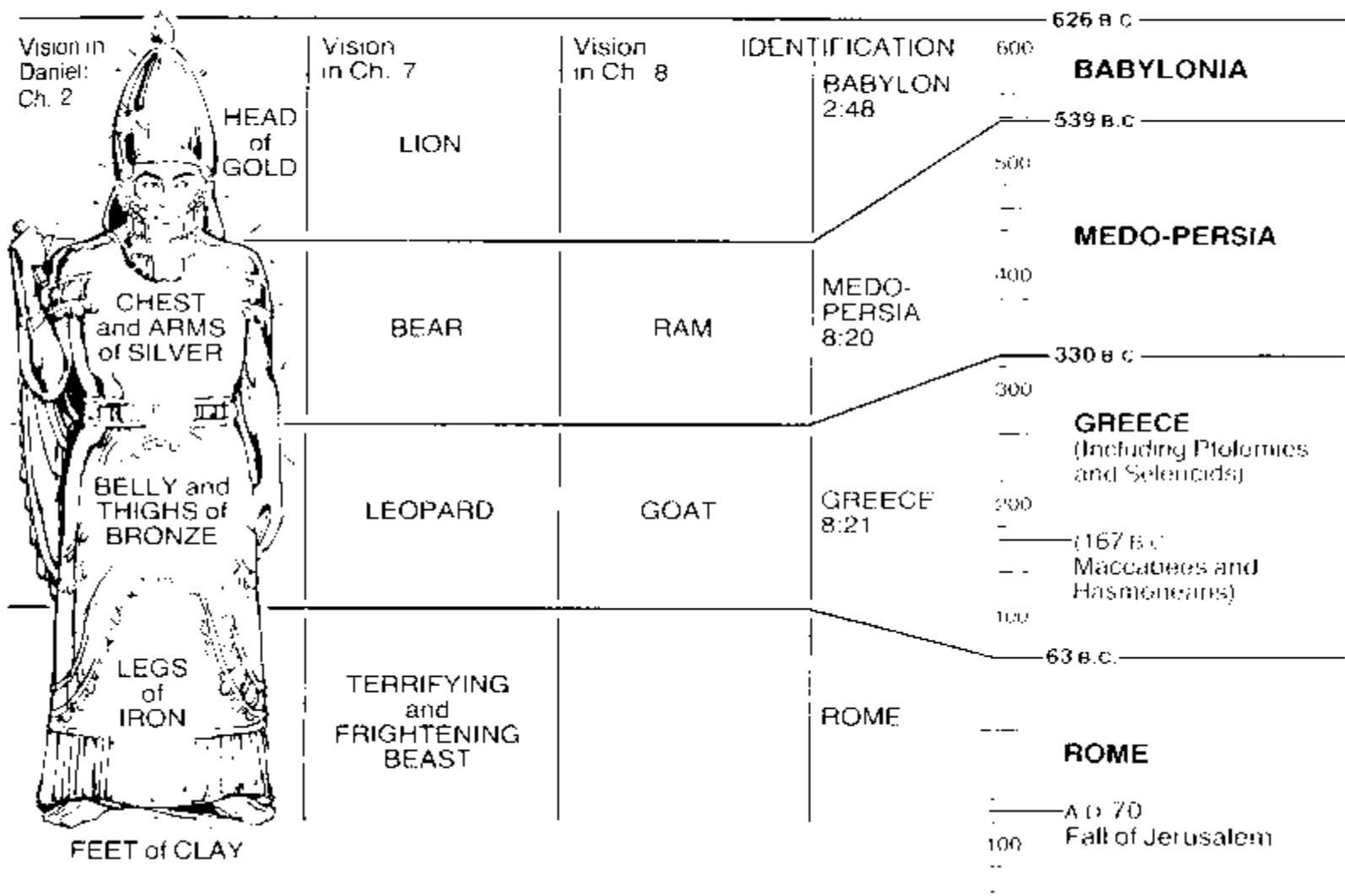
[the two witnesses] “probably represent a small body of Christians who remained in Jerusalem to testify against” the temple. “They are portrayed as two, in that they are legal witnesses to the covenant curses.”

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Identification of the Four Kingdoms

Chronology of Major Empires in Daniel



Problems with Smiting Stone = Christ's First Advent

- Christianity did not suddenly fill the whole earth
- Rome was not destroyed
- Rome did not consist of ten simultaneous kings
- Christ was not a smiting stone
- Christ did not put an end to the earthly kingdoms
- Christ did not usher in a political kingdom

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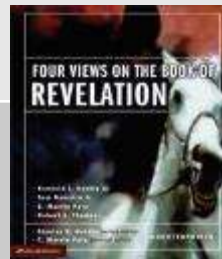
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The Woman (Rev. 12)

- **Preterist**: Represents the 1st century Church
- **Futurist**: Israel in the Tribulation



Gentry

He Shall Have Dominion, 422 (emphasis mine)

“In Revelation 12 John backs up chronologically in order to show the ‘mother’ *church* in Jerusalem, which was being protected from Satan inspired resistance. This would cover the time frame from Christ’s ministry through the Book of Acts up until the destruction of Jerusalem.”



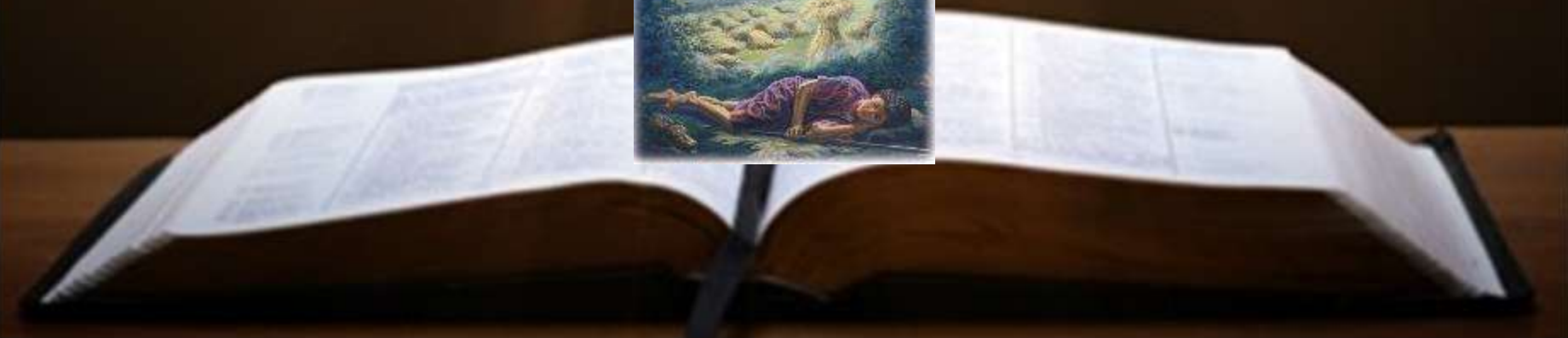
Problems with the Woman (Rev 12) = Church

- Absence of “church” in Rev 4–22
- Chronological problem (12:5)
- Parallel with Gen 37:9-10
- Fulfillment of Rev 12 prior to A.D. 70?



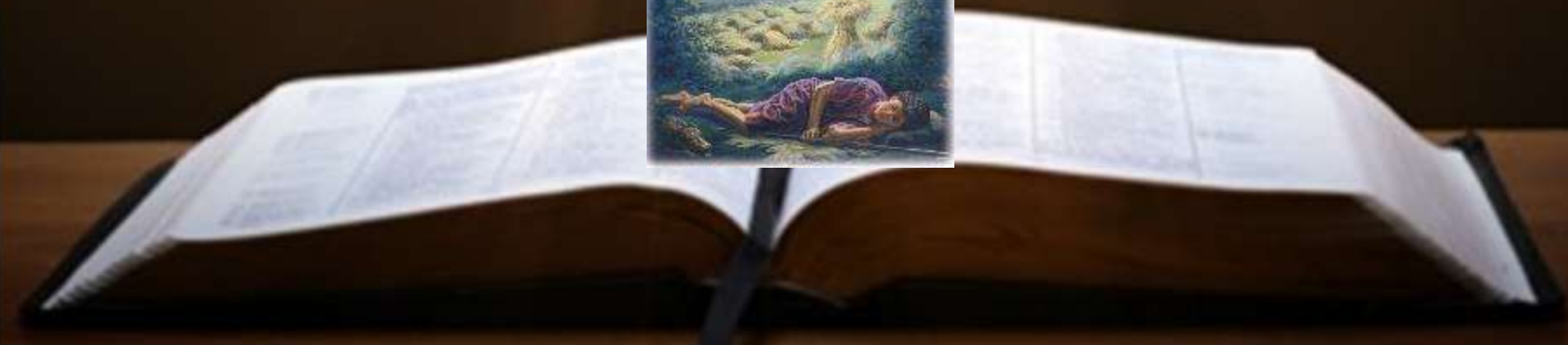
Genesis 37:9

Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, “Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.



Genesis 37:10

He related it to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?”



Assigning Meaning to Revelation's Symbols and Figures of Speech

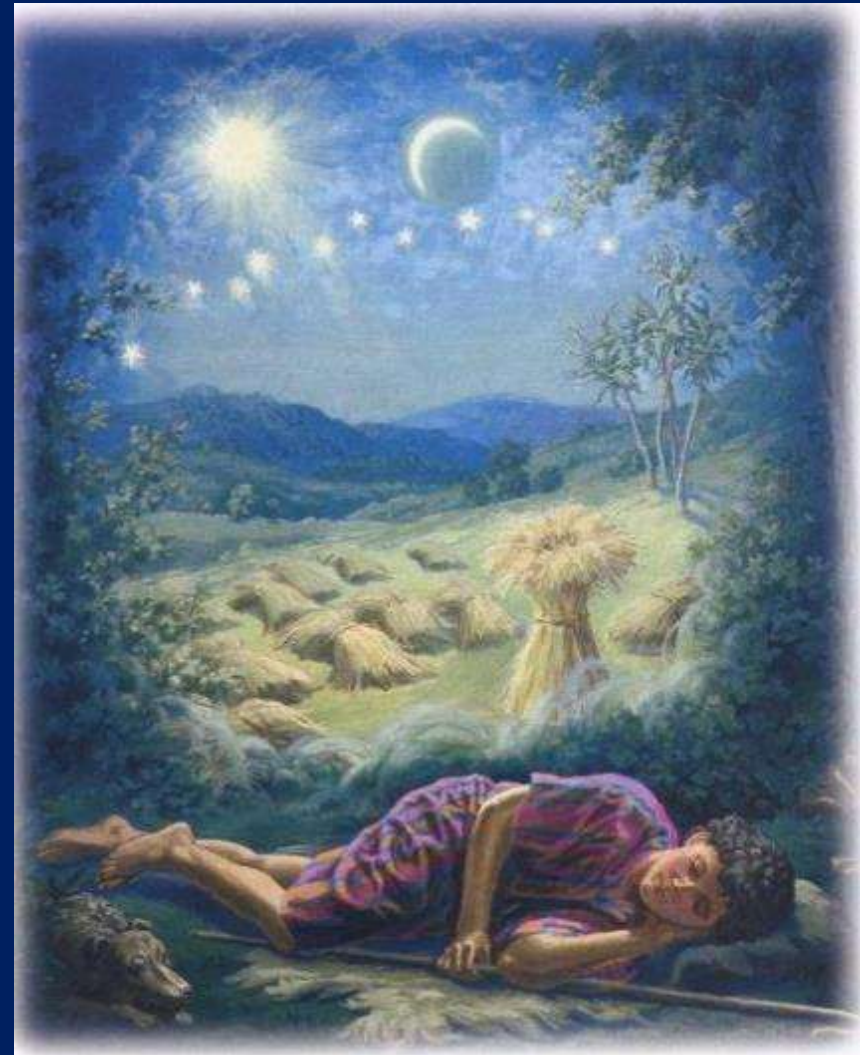
Sun = Jacob

Moon = Leah

11 Stars = Joseph's brothers

12th Star = Joseph

12 Stars = Israel's twelve
tribes



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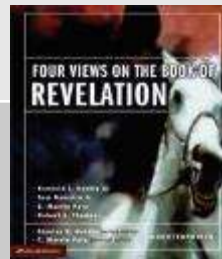
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The Beast (Rev. 13)

- Preterist: the beast is Nero
- Futurist: the beast is the future antichrist



TABLE OF ALPHABETIC NOTATION OF NUMERALS

	Hebrew	Greek		Hebrew	Greek
1	א	α	50	ה	ν
2	ב	β	60	ו	ξ
3	ג	γ	70	ז	ο
4	ד	δ	80	ח	π
5	ה	ε	90	ט	φ
6	ו	ς	100	י	ρ
7	ז	σ	200	כ	ρ
8	ח	τ	300	ל	σ
9	ט	θ	400	מ	τ
10	י	ι	500	נ	υ
20	כ	κ	600	ס	φ
30	ל	λ	700	ע	ψ
40	מ	μ	800	פ	ω

NERO'S NUMBER

**N
R
V
N
Q
S
R**



Nero Caesar

$$\text{נ} = 50$$

$$\text{ך} = 200$$

$$\text{ו} = 6$$

$$\text{נ} = 50$$

$$\text{ק} = 100$$

$$\text{ס} = 60$$

$$\text{ך} = \underline{200}$$

$$666$$

Problems With Neronian Calculation

- Inconsistent use of numbers
- Transliteration from Greek to Hebrew
- Not suggested by the ancient commentators
- “Cherry picking” to fit an ordained outcome

Nero Does Not Fit the Facts of Revelation 13

■ Nero did not:

- ◆ Usher in persecution for exactly 42 months (13:5)
- ◆ Control the entire planet (13:7; 5:9)
- ◆ Force people to receive a mark on their right hand or forehead in order to participate in the global economy (13:16-18)

Nero Does Not Fit the Facts of Revelation 13

- Nero did not:
 - ◆ Coerce the entire world to worship a singular image of him (13:15)
 - ◆ Resurrect from the dead (13:14)
 - ◆ Associate with a miracle working false prophet (13:13, 15)
 - ◆ Receive global veneration (13:8)

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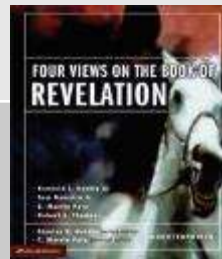
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Babylon (Rev. 17-18)

- **Preterist**: Babylon is 1st century Jerusalem
- **Futurist**: Babylon is a future city/ system



Babylon (Rev 17–18) ≠ 1st Century Jerusalem

- “Great city” (Rev 11:8; 18:10)
- Harlot = Jerusalem (Jer 2–3; Ezek 16; 23; Hos 9:1)



≠



Isaiah 23:17

“It will come about at the end of seventy years that the LORD will visit Tyre. Then she will go back to her harlot's wages and will play the harlot with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth.”



Nahum 3:4

“All because of the many harlotries of the harlot, The charming one, the mistress of sorceries, Who sells nations by her harlotries And families by her sorceries.”



Additional Problems with Equating Babylon and Jerusalem

- “Babylon” should retain its ordinary meaning
- Fulfillment of Old Testament Prophecies concerning Babylon (Jer 50–51; Zech 5:5-11)
- Details of Rev 17–18 bear little resemblance to 1st century Jerusalem

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Literal Geography in Revelation

Thomas, Revelation 8 to 22: An Exegetical Commentary, 206-207.

Asia	1:4	Sardis	3:1
Ephesus	2:1	Philadelphia	3:7
Smyrna	2:8	Laodicea	3:14
Pergamum	2:12	Euphrates	9:14;16:12
Thyatira	2:18	Armageddon	16:16

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Jeremiah 50-51

- Sudden destruction (51:8)
- Complete destruction (50:3, 13, 26, 39-40; 51:29, 43, 62)
- No reuse of building materials (51:26)
- Believers flee (50:8; 51:6, 45)
- Israel's regeneration (50:2, 4-5, 20; 51:50)

Parallels Between Jeremiah 50-51 & Revelation 17-18

	Jeremiah	Revelation
Associated with a Golden cup	51:7a	17:3-4; 18:6
Dwelling on many waters	51:13	17:1
Intoxicating the nations	51:7b	17:2
Same name	50:1	17:5
Stone sinking into Euphrates	51:63-64	18:21
Sudden destruction	51:8	18:8
Destroyed by fire	51:30	17:16
Final, uninhabitable	50:39	18:21
Deserved	50:29	18:6
God's people flee	51:6, 45	18:4
Heaven rejoices	51:48	18:20

Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17-18 (Part 2)," 441-43.

Zechariah 5:5-11

- Woman (wickedness)
- Ephah (commerce)
- House (Temple-2 Sam 7; religion)
- Shinar (Gen 10:10; 11:2; Dan 1:2)



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Jerusalem's Dissimilarities with Revelation 17–18

- Sitting on many waters (17:15)?
- Reigns over the kings of the earth (17:18)?
- Economic power (18)?
- Mother of harlots (17:5)?
- Never to be rebuilt again (18:21)?

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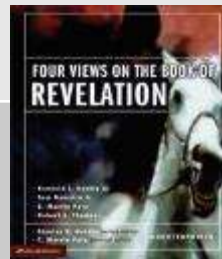
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Christ's 1000 Year Reign

- **Preterist**: The millennium is a spiritual kingdom that began in the 1st century
- **Futurist**: The millennium is an earthly kingdom that will follow Christ's 2nd advent

Four Problems with a Spiritualized Millennium

- Deliteralization of “thousand years”
- Kingdom now (Rev 3:21; 5:10; 12:5)?
- Two resurrections (20:4-5)?
- Second Advent (20:9)?



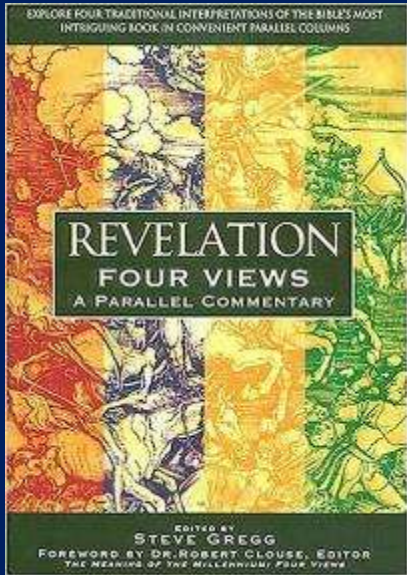
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Steve Gregg

Revelation: Four Views, 11-12



“As in other apocalypses, certain numbers in Revelation convey concepts more than count units. The most evident of these is seven – the number of completeness or perfection.”

Kenneth L. Gentry

He Shall Have Dominion: A Post Millennial Eschatology (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian economics, 1992), page 335.



“The proper understanding of the thousand-year time frame in Revelation 20 is that it is representative of a long and glorious era and is not limited to a literal 365,000 days. The figure represents a perfect cube of 10, which is the number of quantitative perfection.”

Reasons for Understanding 1000 Literally

- John's use of indefinite concepts elsewhere
 - ◆ Revelation 20:8, 20:3
- Exception to the “# of years” examples?
- Other numbers are taken literally
 - ◆ Two witnesses (11:3), 7000 people (11:13), 4 Angels (7:1) 7 Angels (8:6), 144,000 Jews (7:4), 42 months (11:2), 1260 days (11:3)
- Not always a symbolic interpretation
 - ◆ (Rev. 17:18)

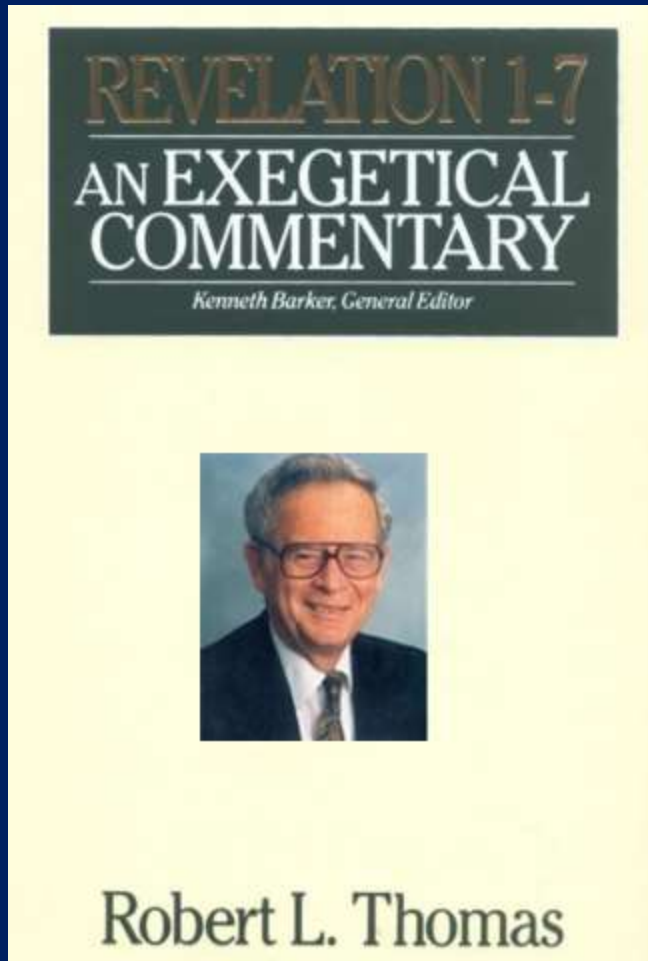
Psalm 50:10 (NASB)

“For every beast of the forest
is Mine, The cattle on a
thousand hills.



Robert Thomas

Revelation 8 to 22: An Exegetical Commentary
(Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 408.



Robert Thomas observes that, "no number in Revelation is verifiably a symbolic number."

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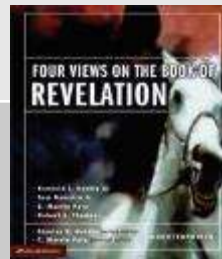
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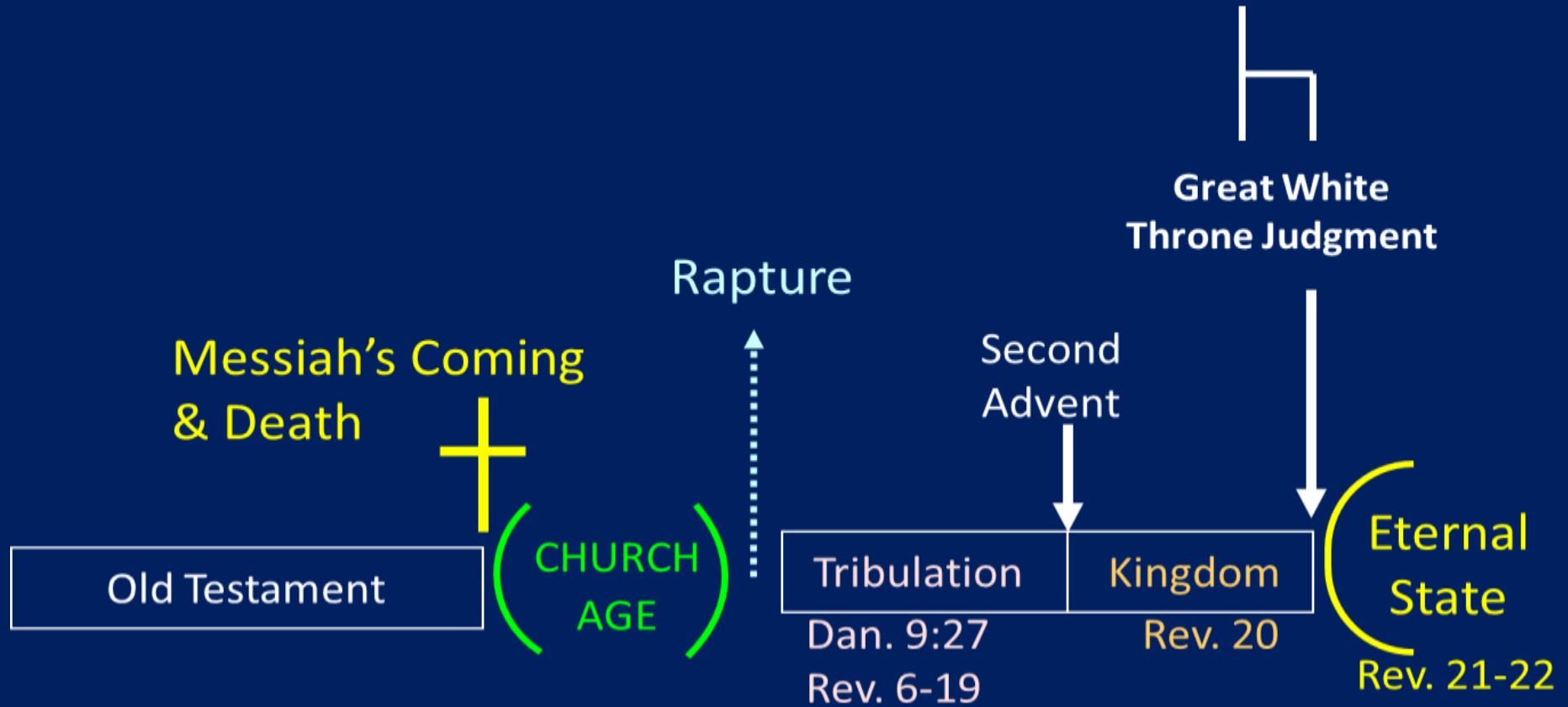
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The Eternal State (Rev. 21-22)

- **Preterist**: a spiritual new creation that began in the 1st century
- **Futurist**: a new creation that follows the millennium, future final judgment, and the destruction of the present world

Prophecy Panorama



Eternal State is Future

- I. No Satan (Rev 20:10)
- II. No sea (Rev 21:1)
- III. No death, crying, or pain (Rev 21:4)
- IV. No Sun (Rev 22:5)
- V. No Moon (Rev 21:23)
- VI. No temple (Rev. 21:22)
- VII. No night (Rev 21:25)
- VIII. No evil (Rev 21:27)
- IX. No curse (Rev 22:3)



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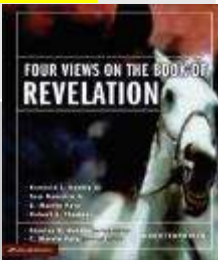
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Concluding Exhortation (Rev. 22:10)

- **Preterist**: teaches that John's vision had to be fulfilled in John's lifetime
- **Futurist**: teaches that John's vision could be understood within his lifetime

Sealing and Unsealing

- Daniel 12:9 “Go your way Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time.” (Emphasis mine)
- Revelation 22:10 “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.” (Emphasis mine)

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Conclusion

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