



# The Four Schools of Interpretation for the Book of Revelations

By Sister Sharon Roach

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I receive numerous emails from people who have read various books on the end times. Many people mix different interpretations of Revelations and come up with a collection of chaos and confusion. God is not the author of confusion. From my own experiences and study of Revelations I have found that its one great story of how God will save and elevate mankind through His son Jesus Christ. Revelations reads like a great epic of how good finally triumphs over evil. When you read my interpretations of Revelations you will see this “story” theme because the Holy Spirit has shown me how the various prophecies, figures and symbols are connected to one everlasting theme which is the glory of God revealed to man.

When interpreting the book of Revelations there are 4 distinct schools of thought that people tend to follow. I don't subscribe to either. However, it is my belief that the book of Revelations cannot be confined to mans “school of thought” but that of the Holy Spirits interpretation. Many people interpret the beast of Revelations as being the Roman Empire, the papacy or the antichrist not realizing that all of these beliefs can be traced to the 4 schools of interpretation. A couple of the schools of thought can be traced to religious prostelyzing in which a certain religion is attempting to prove itself superior over others through end time prophecy. In this edition I want to take a brief look at the four schools of thought using the beast as an example. I always tell Prophecy Digest subscribers to analyze research and verify what is presented to you by spiritual leaders. I encourage you to do your own research and validate what I say in this article as well.

## **A little background**



The roots of the 4 schools of interpretation were birthed out of the Protestant Revolt or Reformation which tried to reform the corrupt Roman Catholic Church. They were a group of Western European Catholics who were sick of the many false doctrines, ecclesiastic malpractice, the sale of indulgencies (you could pay a priest to indulge in a particular sin and be forgiven) and the selling and buying of clerical offices much like our politicians today. The Reformation begin in 1517 when Martin Luther published his famous “The Ninety Five Theses” and it ended in 1648 with the Treaty of Westphalia. During the

Reformation period numerous religious wars were fought throughout Europe. The 4 schools of biblical interpretation are actually warring factions themselves pitting one religion against the other.

## Preterism



Preterism comes from the Latin word Praeter which means “past” or “beyond,” asserting the belief that a majority if not all of Bible prophecy was fulfilled by A.D. 70. Those who follow this school of thought are called preterists. It formally began with Luis De Alcasar who was a Jesuit Priest. His interpretations helped the Roman Catholic Church in their arguments with Protestants during the Reformation. Within preterism there are divisions such as those who call themselves Partial preterists who believe in two Second Comings, one at A.D. 70 and the other at the end of age.

Full preterists believe in only one Second Coming. Preterists believe that the beast is the Roman Empire and that the great whore Babylon is ancient Rome.

## Historicist



Historicism believes in literal earthly fulfillment of the book of Revelation through the history of the church age. During the Reformation period, historicism became the Protestants answer to the Roman Catholic preterist view of interpretation. Such historical figures as Martin Luther and John Calvin were proponents of historicism. Historicist viewed the Roman Catholic Church as an apostasy. Today, the historicist view is adopted by many Christians but particularly among the Adventist faiths. Within Seventh –

Day Adventist Historicism the beast of Revelation symbolizes the Papacy, the second beast symbolizes the United States of America and the image of the beast represents Protestant Churches. The Adventist claim that the “mark of the beast” refers to a future universal Sunday Law.

## Idealist



Idealism is the most liberal and expansive within the 4 schools of interpretation. The meaning itself is broad “Any of various systems of thought in which the object of external perception is held to consist of ideas not resulting from any unperceived material substance.” It stands in opposition to realism which

means “things in an ideal form; the practice of forming or pursuing ideals.” Within Revelations interpretation it looks at the prophecies from a “non-literal” perspective, there is no set pattern as with preterism and historicism. You will often hear it by other names such as spiritual approach, the allegorical approach and the nonliteral approach. The beast of Revelations is not viewed as “one” particular entity or person within the Idealist interpretation. Idealist views the beast of Revelations as a succession of ungodly empires that emerges within every generation until the last days.

## Futurism



Historicism was supplanted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by futurism due to the rise of dispensationalist theology. Futurism views fulfillment of the book of Revelation as literal, physical, apocalyptic and global. It is most popular among Protestant evangelicals who are dispensationalist. Dispensationalism is based on biblical hermeneutic that sees a series of chronologically successive periods in history in which God relates to humans in different ways. The modern “end times” movement you see among prophets finds its roots in dispensationalism. In futurism and dispensationalism, the beast of Revelations is the revived Roman Empire in another form. Proponents of futurism and dispensationalism include Chuck Swindoll, Tim LaHaye, Rev. John C. Hagee, Clarence Larkin, Hal Lindsey, Charles Caldwell Ryrie and the late Jerry Falwell.

Now that you are a little familiar with the 4 most popular schools of biblical interpretation you can better understand where many interpretations of Revelation prophecy are coming from. Many modern authors use the ideology of all 4 schools of interpretation making it difficult to determine if they belong to either of the schools. When you read the book of Revelation you will find evidence to support them all which is why there is no single dominant school of interpretation. Once again I state that the greatest way to interpret the events of Revelations is through the Holy Spirit.

I hope this article has helpful to you. Please feel free to pass it on to your friends and family.



*Sister Sharon Roach*  
[www.americanprophecy.com](http://www.americanprophecy.com)  
[prophetroach@gmail.com](mailto:prophetroach@gmail.com)