

Textual Interpretation

Chapter 7

Associated With Christian Thought

One of the most complex and diverse developments of Christianized Western culture has been the evolution of the views as to what constitutes a viable and valid interpretation of root Christian documents contributing to the rise of that culture. In sacred writings, the root documents that are arguably most pivotal and controversial are those of the highly prophetic books: the Old Testament book of Daniel and the New Testament book of Revelation.

The following summary outlines several of the most recognized mainstream systems utilized in the interpretation of these books and cites the most salient conclusions of the interpretive methods employed. The interpretative systems considered are: (1) Futurism, (2) Amillennialism (3) Preterism, (4) Historicism, (5) Pre-New Testament Jewish interpretation of the book of Daniel (6) Allegorism (7) the Idealist/Spiritual interpretative system and (8) Covenant Theology. The relatively new interpretative system, (9) Textualism, is cited as a significant interpretative treatment of the materials in question.

1. Futurism

Futurism, arguably the most prominent theory of the "end times," has recently been given significant public impetus via the best-selling *Left Behind* book series. One in every ten American has reportedly read a book from the *Left Behind* series. The *Left Behind* books postulate a turbulent seven-year tribulation, which follows a secret rapture of Christians. At this time Futurism adherents number in the millions, with many fervent believers in this view.

This interpretation arose out of the Catholic Counter Reformation as a response to Luther and the Protestants. The position was first proposed by the Jesuit Francisco Ribera (1537-1591) of Salamanca, Spain. The 500-page commentary on the grand points of Babylon and Antichrist had the primary objective of setting aside the teaching of the Protestants that the Papacy was the Antichrist (the Historicist position). In his commentary Ribera relegated the first chapters of Revelation to the first century, with the rest allocated to a literal three-and-one half years at the end of time. He taught that a

single individual Antichrist would abolish the Christian religion, deny Christ, and conquer the world. The Italian cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) further popularized the teachings of Ribera. In 1826-30, Samuel Maitland, librarian to the Archbishop of Canterbury, became the first Protestant to accept the Futurist position. Subsequently, this Jesuit scheme of interpretation was adopted by Protestants far and wide and was amplified with the rapture theory.

Futurism interprets Biblical symbols, mostly of Daniel and Revelation, as symbols applying only to the end of the age, perhaps the last 20-50 years of human history. In Futurist interpretation a single individualized Antichrist reigns during a specific three-and-one-half year period, the culmination of the 70-year prophecy of Daniel (Daniel 9:24-27). In this interpretation a prophetic final "week" of seven years is posited to complete the initial 70 years after a long "gap" in the prophetic chain.¹ The seventieth week of the prophecy is expected to commence after the rapture of the church. During this final prophetic week the rise of the Antichrist, the Great Tribulation and Armageddon are anticipated. In these calculations, Futurist literature typically has assigned the years 32 A.D. to 34 A.D. as the critical dating of the crucifixion, which allows plausible application of other 'gap' theory calculations.² In addition to the 'gap' theory of the 70-year prophecy of Daniel, the two other most pertinent teachings of Futurism involve the rapture of the church³ and the restoration of the state of Israel.⁴ (For a full ChristianText exposition of the 70-year prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 see Chapter 10 Part II. For a review of the ChristianText dating of the crucifixion see Chapters 4, 5 & 6.)

In Futurism, Revelation 1:19 becomes a pivotal departure point in that it provides an underlying interpretative rationale. Futurists generally assume the text "and what is to take place hereafter;" refers to the prophetic predictions in Revelation which occur after the things in the church or church age have taken place,⁵ things that occur after the church is gone--secretly raptured away.

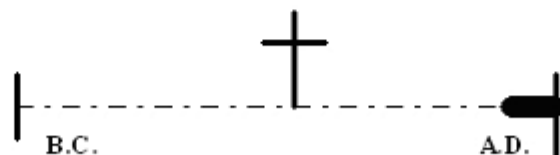
The breaking of the 'seals' of Revelation 6:1 represents an application of what is to take place "hereafter." In this seal a white horse (v. 2) is seen. Some Futurists have interpreted this representation as the proclamation of the gospel to the entire world at the end of the age while other Futurists see in

this text the harbinger of the predicted Antichrist, the expected government that is to rule the world in the last days at the hands of the Gentiles, the revived Roman Empire. The remaining seals are applied to conditions also expected in the final period of earth's history. In Revelation 6:4, for example, the fiery red color of horse is seen as suggesting bloodshed, and speaks of the war that comes upon the earth during the Tribulation period. Some Futurists have identified the rider of this horse with Russia and her Middle East Arab allies, which are expected to attack Israel. (A review of the ChristianText exposition of Revelation Chapters 4, 5 & 6 is given in Chapter 8.)

The doctrine of the rapture of the church is critically pertinent in Futurism as it relates to the expected occurrence of world tribulation at the end of the age. Some Futurists believe that the Christians are secretly raptured away from the earth prior to this tribulation period. These believers are known as Pre-Tribulationists. Those Futurists who believe the rapture follows the expected world tribulation are known as Post-Tribulationists. 'Pre-Tribulationist' and 'Post-Tribulationist' proponents constitute a significant divergent population within the Futurist belief system and are the dominate positions of Futurism. However, there are also Futurists that adhere to a Mid-Tribulation rapture position and those who maintain a Partial Tribulation rapture belief.

Adherents of Futurism typically do not embrace a specific economic policy. Today the majority of Fundamentalist Protestants and many Evangelicals ascribe to the Futurist interpretive system. As such Futurist belief is a dominate interpretative system which constitutes a large part of world Christian culture.

Time Profile:



**Three pages of
Chapter 7 are shown
as a sample of this
chapter.**

**This chapter and
the entire book,
GENESIS II,
may be purchased
via the purchase
menu.**

**Click on the link
below to access the
purchase menu.**

Buy Now

