Here are brief definitions of the four major interpretive approaches:

* **Preterist:** Revelation speaks of things that are already history. The book isn’t prophecy about the end of time; it’s directed at Christians trying to live their faith in the Roman Empire. This is the prevailing view among modern scholars who aren’t aligned with orthodox Christianity. ***Strength:*** The observation that the book was intended for a first-century audience. ***Weakness:*** Fails to take seriously the idea that the Holy Spirit can reveal what’s going to happen, as the book purports to do.
* **Historicist:** Revelation gives a bird’s eye view of the entire sweep of Christian church history, from the post-Pentecost church (Acts 2) until Jesus returns. This view has few adherents today. ***Strength:*** The conviction that God controls the course of history. ***Weakness:*** Revelation then has little relevance for its original audience; also, historicists have wildly divergent views concerning the particulars.
* **Idealist:** There’s no correlation between the visions and any historical reality; they’re simply symbols of the ongoing struggle between good and evil. ***Strength:*** The recognition that the book clearly communicates enduring ideals. ***Weakness:*** Divorces ideas from history, thereby calling into question Jesus’s historical death, resurrection, and ascension.
* **Futurist:** By the sixth seal (6:12–17), the book describes events leading up to Jesus’s return. Glances at earlier stages of redemptive history (as in Rev. 12) illuminate End Time events. The focus is on a historical struggle that unfolds at the end of the age and climaxes with Jesus’s Second Coming. ***Strength:*** Incorporates the insights of the other views without sacrificing the essential point of their position: namely, that the book prophesies a literal return of Jesus and a new creation. ***Weakness:*** The weakness of the futuristic view is that it interprets 1:9–3:22 just like preterists and historicists, that is, as referring to the first century. Then it declares that at 4:1, or at least by 6:12, the sixth seal, everything else is about the final period of earth history before Christ returns. Critics find this arbitrary and therefore unconvincing.

## Book of Revelation: Perspectives on the Millennial Kingdom

The exact meaning of the *Millennium,* the 1,000 year reign that John speaks of in Revelation 20, is a centuries-old debate in Christian circles. One problem comes from the different interpretations concerning the meaning of the Millennium. The following chart can help you sort out these respective viewpoints:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Premillennialism** | **Amillennialism** | **Postmillennialism** |
| Beginning of the Millennium | Jesus’s Second Coming | Jesus’s resurrection | When a majority of the of the Millennium world’s population converts to Jesus |
| Duration | 1,000 years or a long period of time | Undetermined; lasts until Jesus’s Second | Undetermined; lasts until Jesus’s Second |
| Jesus’s type of reign | Physical, earthly | Spiritual (through conversion) | Spiritual (through conversion) |
| Tribulation (period of suffering before Jesus’s Second Coming) | Literal 7-year period | Brief period before Jesus’s Second | Brief period before Jesus’s Second |
| Timing of the rapture (transport of believers to heaven) | Before the Tribulation, halfway through, or after it | Occurs as part of Jesus’s Second Coming | Occurs as part of Jesus’s Second Coming |