

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Week 5 – How Can I Understand the Book of Revelation?

October 4, 2016

Isa. 61:1-2; Luke 4:16-21 (READ)

Only John's Gospel and Revelation refer to Jesus as the Word (John 1:1; Rev. 19:13). Only John's Gospel and Revelation describe Jesus as the Lamb (John 1:29; Rev. 5:6, 8; Rev. 21:9, 14, 22-23, 27; Rev. 22:13).

We have seen the glorified Jesus Who was slain from the foundation of the world in the revelation that Jesus gave to His angel for John, for the churches, and for us – the revelation of the Son in all His glory. Where is Jesus the Good Shepherd in the book of Revelation? We see Him with eyes like a flame of fire, His feet like brass as if refined in a furnace, and out of His mouth is a sharp two-edged sword. Is this our Jesus? What are we to do with such a picture?

The intent of this vision in Revelation is NOT to tell us what Jesus looks like, but rather to declare to us Who Jesus is. The Good Shepherd picture of Jesus is incomplete without the Jesus Who is the Judge, Priest, and conquering King.

And, in the midst of Rev. 1:9-20 we see, once again, God's GRACE, as this Judge, Priest, King extends His right hand (hand of power and authority) to touch John and to speak words of comfort to him.

I continue to gravitate toward thinking that Jesus gave John this vision of Himself as Judge, Priest, and King, to prepare John for the graphic scenes of the horrors and butchery of the Tribulation...because of SIN!

Revelation and the Gospels give us a COMPLETE picture of Jesus!

We are not astonished at Jesus as the Lamb of God. Yet, we are unnerved at seeing the Jesus of Revelation...seeing Him raging against sin. Do we grasp from what we have been saved? Do we comprehend the BATTLE against sin?

What are believers going to look like in our future resurrected, glorified body?

I John 3:2 – it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him.

Job 19:26 – in my flesh I shall see God

I Cor. 15:42-43 - ⁴² *So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.* ⁴³ *It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body....* Four ways in which the new body – our glorified body - will differ from the present ones:

- Raised in incorruption: no more sickness and death (“corruption”)
- Raised in glory: no more shame because of sin (“dishonor”)
- Raised in power: no more frailty (“weakness”)

- Raised a spiritual body: no more limits to the time/space sphere (“natural”).

How do we see the redeemed in the book of Revelation following the rapture?

Rev. 4:4

Rev. 19:11-15

Seeing Jesus in Revelation 1 is our foundation. Our understanding of Who He is MUST undergird the book of Revelation!

Jesus commissioned John to write more because God wants us to know.

Read Daniel 9:20-23

God has given us His word. What’s our part? Are we reading? Are we studying? Are we sharing with others what we’re learning?

HOW CAN I UNDERSTAND THE BOOK OF REVELATION?

We need to have a consistent NORMAL interpretation of the Bible. (Hermeneutics – the study of/the science of interpretation esp. of the Bible or literary texts) A normal interpretation is understand the Bible for what it says. It is holding to a literal interpretation consistently/regularly, even when studying apocalyptic literature!

A literal interpretation highlights that we are NOT to look for other meanings in the passage if the natural meaning of the text/the literal meaning of the text makes normal sense. We are not to “spiritualize/allegorize” – using a story, poem, picture, or an example to reveal a “hidden” meaning, or a “deeper” meaning. We are not to assign meanings to words or phrases when it is clear the author, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, meant it to be understood as it is written. Many tend to think that finding a “hidden” or “deeper” meaning is more prized than understanding a literal meaning. If you come away with a “deeper” meaning and someone else unearths another “deeper” meaning, which one is correct?

The literal approach to Scripture is in keeping with II Tim. 3:16 - *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*

Allegorizing/spiritualizing example in Revelation: Revelation 20 tells us that Jesus will return to earth and reign for 1,000 years. This is what is known as the Millennial Kingdom on earth. Millennium means 1,000. Many have assigned various meanings to the 1,000 year reign of Christ. Many have taught that it isn’t 1,000 literal years; many have taught that the 1,000 years should be looked upon as not a definite 1,000 years, but as a long period of time. The text tells us about the 1,000 years six times in Revelation 20! Scripture is quite adamant regarding the length of the Millennial Kingdom – 1,000 years! NOTE: a smattering of OT and NT passages re: the Millennial Kingdom: Job. 19:25-27; Psa. 2; Psa. 110; Isa. 2; Isa. 11; Isa. 25; Isa. 65; Isa. 66; Eze. 40-48; Zech 13-14; Mal. 3; Matt. 19; Luke 19:12-27 (the parable of the ten minas), Acts 2; II Tim. 2; Rev. 20.

We need to know that the literal method does not eliminate figures of speech. When the Bible speaks of the eye, arms, or wings of God (Psa. 34:15; Isa. 51:9; Psa. 91:4), these should NOT be taken as literally true. God does not have these physical features. How do we know that?

John 4:24 – *God is Spirit.*

Num.23:19 - *God is not a man, that He should lie*

Psa. 42:9 - *I will say to God my Rock,*

God cannot literally be a rock. We've already read that God is not human – he is not a human being. He is not physical/material. The comparison of God to a rock is a metaphor – a figure of speech which makes a comparison between two things that are unrelated but share some common characteristic. God as a rock speaks to God as our firm foundation.

Jesus said, “I am the door”. We know that Jesus is Immanuel, God in the flesh (Isa. 7:14). Jesus comparing Himself to a “door” speaks to the first Passover in Egypt when blood was applied to the door and entrance through the door led to deliverance. NOTE: this was physical deliverance looking forward to spiritual deliverance – salvation for all eternity through Jesus, the Messiah. The door metaphor echoes Jesus’ words in John 14:6 - *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*

EACH SYMBOL POINTS TO SOMETHING LITERAL!

- John saw seven golden lampstands in his vision of One like the Son of Man (Rev. 1:12). Rev. 1:20 tells us that the seven lampstands were the seven churches (Rev. 1:20). Bowls of incense represent the prayers of the saints (Rev. 5:8)
- Jesus literally fulfilled 300+ Messianic prophecies among which several might be viewed as symbolic by some. Examples: He would be from the seed of a woman (Gen. 3:15); conceived by a virgin (Isa. 7:14); the promised Lamb (Gen. 22:8); the sacrificial Lamb (Isa. 53); the Branch (Jer. 23:5-6); “cut off” (Dan. 9:24-26); resurrected from the dead (Psa. 16:10; Isa. 53:10). Don't these all point literally to Jesus?
- Jesus interpreted Isa. 61:1-2 literally – relating to HIM - as He read from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21) thereby indicating His acceptance of the literal interpretation of the OT.
- Jesus taught truth using parables. A parable is a short allegorical story designed in Scripture to teach truth. By providing the interpretation of a parable, Jesus revealed that parables in Scripture have a literal meaning (Matt. 13:18-23 – the parable of the sower explained).
- Jesus rebuked those, the Sadducees, who did not interpret the resurrection literally (Matt. 22:23-33). In this passage, Jesus’ use of Scripture constitutes one of the most convincing evidences that Scripture ought to be interpreted literally!

REMEMBER – context is key. Understand the passage of Scripture you're studying/reading in light of the context. Context is not just what comes before or after the Bible passage on which you're focusing. The ENTIRE Bible is our context.

Rev. 1:19 gives us a simple outline for the book. Jesus told John to write. . .
*...the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things
 which will take place after this (Rev. 1:19)*

Revelation 1 - the things John had already seen – the glory of the Son of Man.

Revelation 2 & 3 - the things which are – events occurring in John’s day. The letters to the seven churches.

Revelation 4-22 - the things that will take place after the Church Age - the FUTURE:

Revelation 4-5 – the throne room of God from where the future events are initiated.

Revelation 6-18 – the Tribulation on earth. God’s judgments on the people of the earth. Jer. 30:7 describes this time as the “time of Jacob’s trouble”. (The name of the patriarch Jacob was changed to Israel [Gen. 32:22-32]). The time outlined in Revelation 6-18 is a time of purging for Israel. Dan. 12:1-2 speaks of this time of trouble for Israel. God will also judge non-believers at this time for their rebellion against Him.

Revelation 19 – Christ’s return with the Church.

Revelation 20 – Satan is bound and cast into the bottomless pit, the abyss. Jesus then sets up His kingdom on earth that will last for 1,000 years. At the end of the 1,000 years, Satan is released and he leads a rebellion against God. Satan is quickly defeated and cast into the lake of fire. The final judgment, the Great White Throne judgment, occurs for all non-believers when they too are cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 21-22:5 – Here we have what is referred to as the Eternal State. In these chapters God describes eternity with Him.

Revelation 22:6-11 – an angel instructs John not to seal the words of the prophecy of this book. They are for us to read and understand!

Revelation 22:12-17 – Jesus testifies to the churches.

Revelation 22:18-19 – Jesus testifies to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book.

Revelation 22:20-21 – “Surely I am coming quickly.”

The book of Revelation is understandable. God would not have given these words to us if their meaning was entirely a mystery. The key to understanding the book of Revelation is to interpret it as literally as possible.

There are four main overall approaches to understanding Revelation: the Preterist Approach; the Historicist Approach; the Idealist Approach; and the Futurist Approach.

The **Preterist Approach**, also known as Preterism, understands the events in Revelation as already having occurred in the first century during the Roman Empire. This approach believes that Revelation dealt only with the Church in John's day. Preterists believe that Revelation does not predict anything; John simply described the events of his current day and wrote them in symbolic code so those outside the Church couldn't understand his criticism of the Roman government. Preterism (root word, *preter* in Latin, meaning *past*) teaches that Revelation was written primarily to provide hope and comfort to the first century church persecuted by Rome.

Preterism teaches that end time prophecies have already been fulfilled; they were fulfilled in 70 AD with the destruction of Jerusalem. Preterists interpret the beasts of Rev. 13:1, 2, 11 (antichrist [beast out of the sea] and the false prophet [beast out of the earth]) as imperial Rome.

Preterism conflicts with the book's claim to be prophecy (Rev. 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18-19). The Second Coming of Christ obviously did not take place in the first century. Preterists, however, believe that Jesus returned spiritually in 70 A.D.

God's covenant with Israel is everlasting (Jer. 31:31-36), and there will be a future restoration of Israel (a few passages out of many: Deut. 30:1-6; Isa. 2; Isa. 11:12; Isa. 49:6, 14-26; Isa. 62; Isa. 66:5-24; Jer. 31; Jer. 33; Eze. 36; Eze. 37; Rom. 11:15.).

The **Historicist Approach** views Revelation as a symbolic/allegorical prophetic survey of Church history. The Historicist view understands Revelation as predicting the future, but only the future of the "Church Age." We need to know that the Historicist view is reflected in many of the older "classic" commentaries which tend to treat many of the OT promises to Israel as primarily applying to the NT Church. In other words, there are commentators/teachers who espouse that the promises God made to Israel are no longer for Israel – they are now for the Church. This thinking is known as Replacement Theology (the Church has replaced Israel). I DO NOT believe in Replacement Theology. God made promises to Israel and He swore by Himself (Heb. 6:13). The Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12, 15, 17...) is unconditional (not subject to any conditions) which means that the fulfillment of the promises God made to Israel is based solely on God. Therefore, those promises God made to Israel WILL BE delivered – TO ISRAEL!

The **Idealist Approach** interprets Revelation as a timeless depiction of the cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil. In this view, the book contains neither past history nor future events. This view ignores Revelation's prophetic character as well as noting any connection with historical events. The Idealist view teaches that Revelation is a collection of stories designed to solely teach spiritual truth. The Idealist views Revelation as a book of personal meaning. Consider: what Revelation means to you might mean something entirely different to someone else. Question: so that's OK??

The **Futurist Approach** insists that the events of Revelation 6 through 22 are yet future and that those chapters literally and symbolically depict actual (literal) people and events yet to appear on the world scene – events that will literally be fulfilled. It describes the events surrounding the Second Coming of Jesus, the Millennium, the final judgment, and the Eternal State. Those who hold this view generally believe that everything after Revelation 3 will be fulfilled in the future.

Which approach is correct? The book of Revelation speaks to John's day. It speaks to Church history. And, it does have meaning for our personal lives. We are promised a blessing that we are given – individually – at the beginning of the book and at the end (Rev. 22:7). We cannot, however, deny the place of the Futurist view. Revelation speaks with clarity about the end times. The majority of Revelation unfolds *things which will take place after this* – after the Church Age.

QUESTIONS

How do you understand the Bible? Literally or spiritually?

If you understand the Bible literally but understand the book of Revelation spiritually, why?

From your reading of the book of Revelation, where might you land in terms of the four main approaches: Preterist view, Historicist view, Idealist view, Futurist view?

Do any of these views concern you? Why?

Have you heard teaching on any of these views?

Give reasons for why you're leaning toward or adhering to a specific approach.

What do these four views say about the BIG PICTURE of the Bible?

HOMEWORK

Read the handout for week 5 and look up the Bible verses/passages referenced.

At this point in your study of Revelation, are you veering toward one of the four main approaches to understanding the book of Revelation? WHY?

If you're veering toward one of the four main approaches, what is your take on the other three?

Do all these views speak of the overall view of Scripture? If not, which one does?

Read the handout for week 6 when you receive it via Email.

Share what you have learned thus far about the book of Revelation with a believer and/or a non-believer.