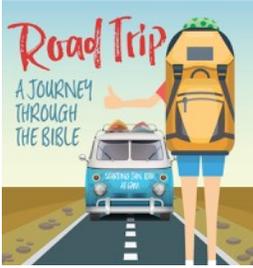


SESSION NINE: APOCALYPSE WHEN?



- CHARACTERISTICS OF APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE
- AUTHORSHIP AND BACKGROUND OF REVELATION
- A SIMPLIFIED OUTLINE OF THE BOOK
- MAJOR INTERPRETIVE "LENSES"

CHARACTERISTICS OF APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

The book of Revelation is similar in respects to some of the Prophets in the Old Testament, and characteristic of religious writings from 200 BC to 200 AD. It is classified as "Apocalyptic Literature" and is "eschatological." This genre has these characteristics:

- 1) Written during turbulent, troublesome times
- 2) Dualism: Good versus evil
- 3) Filled with symbolism
- 4) "Unveiled" something previously unknown
- 5) Offered an ultimate hope or restoration

AUTHORSHIP AND BACKGROUND OF REVELATION

While Revelation was disputed by the early church, indications are strong that John the Beloved Disciples (and author of the Gospel and Epistles) is the author. Some believe "John the Revelator" was a different John. Likely, this was the last biblical book written near the end of the first century.

Revelation meets all the characteristics of "Apocalyptic Literature:"

- 1) Christianity was under severe persecution under the Flavian Dynasty: Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian (69-96 AD)
- 2) Emperor worship was a requirement of the day forcing Christians to choose
- 3) No single book has more seemingly bizarre symbols than Revelation: Numbers (3, 7, 12, 24); Beasts; Dragons; Harlots; Horns; Seals; Stars, etc.
- 4) Revelation 1:19: "Write down what you have seen- both the things that are now happening and the things that will happen."
- 5) Ultimately, the book of Revelation is about the final victory of the Kingdom of God over the kingdoms of the world.

A SIMPLIFIED OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

- I. Prologue and Introduction (1:1-20)
- II. The Seven Churches of Revelation (2:1-3:22)
- III. The Seven Scenes in Heaven (4:1-5:14)

IV. The Seven Seals (6:1-8:5)

V. The Seven Trumpets (8:6-11:19)

VI. The Seven Signs (12:1-14:20)

VII. The Seven Plagues (15:1-16:21)

VIII. The Seven Final Visions (17:1-20:15)

IX. The Final Victory (21:1-22:6)

X. Epilogue and Conclusion (22:7-22:21)

MAJOR INTERPRETIVE LENSES

There are five major interpretive matrixes applied to the book of Revelation. Each matrix or “lens” has multiple sub-divisions, leading to scores of individual interpretations of the book. For our purposes, we will look at only the major ones.



1. The PRETERIST view (Looking “Back”)

“Preter” means “the past.” This view says that most - if not all - of the book of Revelation, has been fulfilled. It was written addressing the unique circumstances of the first century. This was the first accepted view of the church and remains popular in Catholicism.



2. The HISTORICIST view (Looking “Over”)

Historicists read the book of Revelation as being continually fulfilled. It is a view of history as it proceeds toward the end of time. This view reached peak popularity during the Reformation and with the Reformers.



3. The FUTURIST view (Looking “Forward”)

Futurists accept that a great deal of the book of Revelation has yet to be fulfilled. A major school of interpretation is “Dispensationalism” formulated articulately by John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). The Futurist view is popular in America today.



4. The IDEALIST view (Looking “Around”)

This is also called the SYMBOLIC or ALLEGORICAL method of interpretation. Idealists see the cosmic story playing out in Revelation. Good versus evil, darkness versus light, etc. These interpreters see the book as having been fulfilled and yet to be fulfilled.



5. The ECLECTICIST view (Looking “Everywhere”)

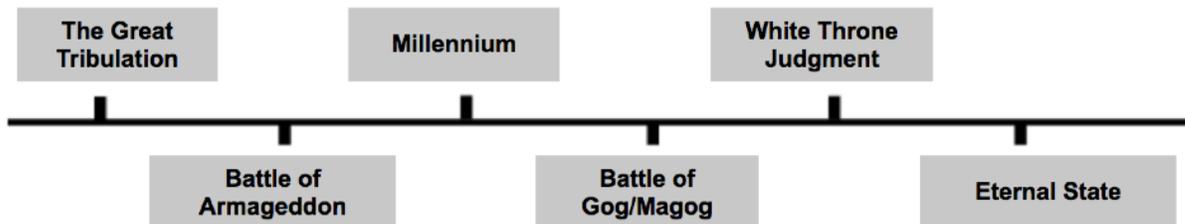
Sometimes referred to as the SYNTHETIC view, this is an attempt to reconcile the weaknesses of the other major views of Revelation. Elements of the past and future interpretations, are meshed with the allegory and symbols. George Ladd (1911-1982) was a proponent of this view.

Related to the above views, is the parallel interpretation of the “Rapture” and “MILLENNIALISM” (Revelation 20:1-6).

A-MILLENNIALISM: The 1000-year reign of Christ is symbolic and has already begun (at Easter). Christ will return at the end of the age to establish his eternal Kingdom with the new creation.

POST-MILLENNIALISM: The 1000-year reign of Christ has begun and will culminate as the Gospel succeeds in converting the nations. Christ will then return to end history and establish eternity.

PRE-MILLENNIALISM: The 1000-year reign of Christ is yet to come and will be literal. The order of events, generally are:



In regards to the “Rapture” of the church, it is largely a Pre-Millennial view. The Rapture will occur before the Great Tribulation or mid-way through, making the Second Coming of Christ a “two-part” event. Those who do not accept the Rapture, see the Second Coming as a single event at the end of the age.