

# Interpretative Approaches to Revelation

## *The Influence of Systematic Theology*

- What is Systematic Theology?
  - Systematic theology is the synthesis of all the doctrines taught in scripture to form a unified system of biblical doctrine.
  - It seeks to explain the various themes of scripture and how they relate to each other
  - It often deals with reconciling apparent contradictions found in scripture
  - Its major focus is explaining how God brings about His redemption of mankind.
- What are the major systems?
  - Covenant Theology
    - Foundational principles can be traced to the church fathers
    - Grew as a system of biblical doctrine through the writings of the Reformers.
    - Covenant theology was promoted throughout the western world through the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)
    - Covenant theology posits that God has dealt with mankind primarily through covenants
    - Covenant theology teaches that there are at least two and possibly three covenants
    - It focuses on the unity of scripture in presenting redemption
    - It views the promises to Abraham as being fulfilled in Christ, therefore, there is no distinction between Israel and the church.
    - There are diverse views regarding the end times among Covenant Theologians
  - Dispensational Theology
    - Seminal forms of the most basic dispensational principles can be traced back to the fathers
    - Dispensationalism, as a system of belief, grew from the teachings of John Darby (1800-1882) and was promoted through the publication of C.I. Scofield's reference bible.
    - It flourished in fundamentalism as an alternative to liberal theology
    - Dispensational theology teaches that God deals with mankind differently in different periods of time known as dispensations.
    - Dispensational theology focuses on the diversity of God's dealing with mankind
    - It views the church and Israel as distinct
    - It focuses on a strict "literal" interpretation of scripture
    - It is almost uniformly premillennial and pretribulational in its views of the end times

## *Major Evangelical Eschatological Positions*

- Amillennialism
  - Literally means “no millennium”
  - Claims that there will be no literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth
  - The 1,000 years mentioned in Revelation 20 are symbolic of an extended reign of Christ that is currently happening
  - The “millennial” reign is identical with the church age
  - Christ will return to destroy the world, resurrect the dead, judge them, and create a new heaven and earth
  - Much of what is written in Revelation is symbolic and should not be taken literally
- Postmillennialism
  - Postmillennialism sees Christ’s second coming as occurring after the millennium
  - The millennium will be the Golden Age of Christianity
  - The church can usher in the return of Christ by preaching the kingdom
  - Once the whole world reflects the kingdom, Christ will return
  - Treats much of Revelation as symbolic
- Premillennialism
  - This view understands that all that has happened up to this point is before the millennium.
  - There will be a future, literal reign of Christ on earth for 1,000 years
  - This reign will be the time that God completely fulfills His promises to Israel and David
  - The millennium will be preceded by the rapture of the church
  - The book of Revelation should generally be taken literally

## *Evangelical Approaches to Understanding Revelation*

- Preterist
  - This view states that the events described in Revelation occurred in the 1st century and were experienced by the recipients of John’s letter
  - Generally, this view takes the early date (64) for when the book was written
  - Revelation is generally a prophecy about the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70
  - “Babylon” refers to either unrepentant Israel or the Roman empire
- Historicist
  - The seals, trumpets, and bowls of Revelation represent successive ages of church history
  - Revelation refers to a series of historical events within the western church (
  - The historicist always views the return of Christ as imminent to his current time (he is always in the last age)
  - Revelation is always interpreted according to the current conditions of the church

- Idealist
  - Views the entire book as a cosmic battle between good and evil
  - Almost all of Revelation is symbolic
  - The events of the seals, trumpets, and bowls are descriptive of events all believers in all ages will experience
  - Seeks to make the book relevant for believers at any point in church history
- Futurist
  - The events described in chapters 4-22 refer to events that have yet to take place
  - Revelation lays out God's final eschatological plans in detail
  - Historic Premillennialism: The tribulation period included both the church and Israel and much of what is described is symbolic
  - Dispensationalism: The tribulation and millennial reign of Christ are primarily the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel and as a whole, the book is to be taken literally

## *Symbolism in Revelation*

- Revelation is a book that everyone agrees is filled with symbolism
  - This is indicative of its apocalyptic style
  - This is indicative of OT Prophecy
  - It begins with symbols and then interpretations of the symbols
- How should we interpret the symbols?
  - Understanding literal interpretation
    - Literal interpretation is not rigid interpretation
    - Literal interpretation understands things literally as they are given
    - It is literal to take a symbol as a symbol when it is clearly shown to be a symbol
  - Literal Interpretation understands a writing in its historical and literary context
  - They key is understanding what things John's readers would have understood as symbolic
  - Otherwise, we decontextualize the text and can make it say anything

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## *How should the Christian Approach Eschatology (2 Peter 3)*

- Fully \_\_\_\_\_ that God will do what he has \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 1-4)
- Fully \_\_\_\_\_ in God's \_\_\_\_\_ to Accomplish what He has Promised (vs. 5-7)
- Fully \_\_\_\_\_ in God's \_\_\_\_\_ of His \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 8-10)
- Be Fully \_\_\_\_\_ by God's \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 11-18)