

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

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)