

Sunday, November 21, 2021 pm

A STUDY OF PREMILLENNIALISM (7) Revelation & Apocalyptic literature

We are continuing our study of the doctrine of premillennialism. We are in the midst of addressing specific events related to this theory. We have discussed the rapture and the great tribulation, noting Daniel 9's 70 weeks prophecy and Matthew 24:1-35, both of which we established as being completely fulfilled in the 1st century. Today, we want to complete our examination of the tribulation and note some events that unfold at the end of the great tribulation – events primarily found in Revelation. So in this lesson, we want to address some thoughts about the book of Revelation, and then discuss some of the other elements related to premillennialism – the antichrist and the battle of Armageddon.

I. Concerning the book of Revelation

- i. The first word of the book of Revelation (in Greek) is from the Greek word, ἀποκάλυψις, (apokalypsis). Our word apocalypse is a transliteration of this work. It is a word that means a revealing or unveiling.
- ii. Apocalyptic literature by its very nature highly symbolic.
 1. It uses visionary type scenes usually with the intent that the overall message encourages the intended audience. *Apocalyptic literature has many features in common, but the major characteristic is symbolism. A vision is used as a literary device to introduce a concept.*¹
 2. Apocalyptic literature is a genre that was popular during the first century AD and preceding centuries within the Jewish community. Almost all of this literature was written during times of distress with an overall message of endurance and ultimate victory at the hand of God.
 3. You have heard me say that I can summarize the book of Revelation in 2 words, “God wins!” In doing research on this I find out that I’m not the only one to say that. There are resources available that help explain this type of literature².
 4. The emphasis is that we do not get overly carried away with every detail of every scene. There is the overall message, even in each scene, but sometimes some details are filler to complete the vision.
 5. That is why this type of literature has so many different interpretations. The details are based on speculations. And that is why this type of literature is the playground of premillennialism and other end of age speculation (including date and time settings).
 - a. The premillennialist sees this as some future event – and MOST plug it in to our present generation.
 - b. Hal Lindsey, in his book, “The Late Great Planet Earth” (1970) believed Russia was one of the beasts (those alive then are aware of the cold war)
 6. WHAT we need to glean from this is the fact that Revelation was written in that genre and respect it as such. There are details we may never be able to accurately know what they are (and as such, we don’t need to know).
 7. ALSO, with apocalyptic literature we MUST consider what is clearly declared in other scriptures. The interpretation of Revelation cannot contradict the rest of scripture – and we have addressed the second coming of Christ in other passages – e.g. 1 judgment for both the righteous and

¹ Harkrider, Robert. Revelation. Truth Commentaries. ©Guardian of Truth Foundation 2008. Pg. 51

² A book I highly recommend is by Mark Roberts, Understanding Apocalyptic Literature. Lower Lights Publications. ©2020. Pg. 96 concludes saying, “*Read Revelation. Let its incredible scenes indelibly stamp this truth deep within: Jesus wins!*”

wicked (John 5:28-29, Matthew 25:31ff), it will be “as a thief in the night” (2 Peter 3:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:2).

8. Consider also the warning of Revelation 22:18-19. Could the abuse of this book be what prompted John to write that?
9. Harkrider in his introduction to Revelation presents 3 rules for studying Apocalyptic literature (including Revelation).³
 - a. Picture the scene – Read the context and try to visualize the scene described (look for illustrations of the scene if you need help – TT)
 - b. Principle – after feeling the emotions depicted, analyze what point is intended.
 - c. Practice – make application FIRST to the original audience, and then determine if there is a lesson for us.
 - d. An example: Revelation 12
 - i. Picture the scene – A woman with child is presented and gives birth. But a fiery dragon appears with 7 heads and 10 horns who seeks to devour the child, but the child is caught up to God and His throne. The woman then flees into the wilderness for 1,260 days. Later in the chapter, the dragon persecutes the woman but she is delivered.
 - ii. Principle – There is a war taking place between God and Satan. And it includes a war between Satan’s followers and God’s followers (Faithful Israelites and Gentiles and Christians). Satan will use whatever resources he has to persecute God’s people.
 - iii. Practice – In this vision, you can clearly see the godly being persecuted by Satan and his followers.
 1. We KNOW that first century Christians were persecuted, and beginning with the latter part of the 1st century, they were persecuted by Rome throughout the empire (E.g. Domitian – 81-96 AD, by Nero – 54-68 AD - on a more limited basis).
 2. **God wins in the end.** How often does scripture promise that God will win – 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Peter 2:9, 1 John 4:4, etc.)
 - iii. Revelation 1:1, *The revelation (apocalypse-TT) of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants...* This is the intended audience. As with all the NT, there are lessons for us to learn, but this book as a specific audience in mind.
 - iv. *Things which must shortly take place* – the word can mean either something that will happen swiftly, or in short order (soon). Considering the nature of apocalyptic literature, the best understanding is that which will happen “soon” – the specifics of this book are the avenging of those to whom this letter was written. Also consider this with 1:3, “the time is near” and 22:10.
 - v. *They were signified by His angel (1:1)* –
 1. The word “signified” is a word that means to make something clear with signs. Much in the same way that Jesus used parables to help explain the kingdom.
 2. In other words, it is symbolic language that is being used to portray a message. That is nature of apocalyptic language and the book of Revelation.
 3. Why was this signified language used here? Why not plainly say what was going to happen?
 - a. Because Christians were facing persecutions for their faith. If this letter was written with a later date (90-95 AD), then Christians throughout the empire were being persecuted severely. There were efforts to outlaw the Christian faith – because it was monotheistic, and they refused to acknowledge Caesar as deity. Most other world religions had no issue with appeasing the king because they were polytheistic. To add another “god” was nothing.
 - b. By writing in a “coded” language, if this letter, which was circulated and likely copied (Because it was to 7 churches), came across the hands of a Roman official, imagine what would happen if the letter said, “Be faithful and endure, God will deal with Rome, and they

³ Harkrider, Revelation, pg. 52-56

will fall.” Instead, Babylon is mentioned. Instead of describing a Caesar or emperor worship, you read about a sea beast and a land beast in Revelation 13.

- c. Consider also that Revelation draws extensively from language in the Old Testament. It is estimated that there are some 400 OT references in the book of Revelation, much of them taken from apocalyptic books and passages. Christians would have had access to the intended meanings of these texts with prophets and Jewish converts who were familiar with the Old Law. It is from these that we can gain some understanding of the possible meaning of various visions. NOTE: Again, be reminded that some of that is dealt with in general terms. For example, in our last lesson we spoke about stars and heavenly bodies falling (Matthew 24:29) and noted that such was found in several OT passages referring to kings and rulers (Revelation 6:12-13, cf. Isaiah 13:10-13 – of Babylon; Isaiah 51:5-6 of various peoples; Amos 8:1-9 – of Israel, etc.)
4. There is inconsistency with premillennialism in applying these texts. They want to make the elements that fit their narrative literal, and others as figurative.
- vi. 1:3 – *the time is near*, 1:19, things that will take place after this.
 1. As already noted, this indicates the message was related to that audience.
 2. That idea is further emphasized by the fact that the letter was addressed to 7 specific congregations in Asia at that time (1:4). They are even named in Revelation 1:11. And then each congregation was singled out based upon its own merits and failings (Revelation 2 & 3).
 3. Consider, if this message was for some time yet future, it would not be timely or relevant for them. We MUST keep this in mind as we consider the book of Revelation.
- vii. Rev. 1:9 – *I John, both your brother and companion, “in the tribulation”* – it was HAPPENING as he wrote! This is another indication of this being about their time. NOTE that John is a companion in the tribulation. More on this in a few moments.
- viii. 1:4 – To the 7 churches of Asia. Written – primarily to encourage and edify Christians THEN who were suffering.
- ix. Let’s be concerned about the overall picture of the visions rather than getting carried away with every detail thinking it has to refer to a specific event or person.
- x. Seek to understand difficult passages in light of more clear passages.

II. Revelation and the Great tribulation

- I. Revelation 7:14 – these had come out of the great tribulation. We have noted the premillennial view of this (sufferers during the 7 years of tribulation). But why is that the necessary explanation? The point is saints of all time had been suffering. Consider:
 - i. Revelation 6:9-11, the opening of the 5th seal - the cry of martyrs who had been persecuted and cried aloud asking, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” They are given white robes and told to rest until the number is complete. I CONTEND the number in Revelation 7:14 INCLUDES this group. These would be the persecuted as Revelation was written.
 - ii. Revelation 7 records first the sealing of those of the tribes of Israel, 144,000 total. This is followed by a great and innumerable from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues (7:9). These came out of the great tribulation. Harkrider, in his Revelation commentary notes at least 4 conflicting explanations: 1) Those persecuted which led to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD (those who date the book at 67 AD would espouse this); 2) Saints suffering as contemporaries of John under the persecutions of the Roman Empire – this would include Nero (~64 AD), Domitian, Trajan, and Diocletian – various emperors who were hostile to Christians; 3) The premillennial view of the 3 ½ year “great tribulation” after the rapture; 4) It is no specific period of time, but descriptive of ALL who through the ages have suffered and been martyred for the cause of Christ. Consider how often scripture makes

- reference to tribulations and persecutions – Acts 14:22, John 16:33, “in the world you will have tribulation”, 2 Timothy 3:12, etc.
- iii. The point: It could have reference to the suffering of saints of all times. Consider, the 144,000 would be the faithful of Israel until the time of Christ who were faithful and willing to suffering for YHWH – as of the writing of Revelation that number was sealed and complete – there would be no more! The great multitude would be the rest of the faithful who suffered, primarily under service to Christ.
 - iv. Honestly, to me, 3 of the 4 EXCEPT for the premillennial view are more plausible when considered in view of the rest of scripture.
- II. Recall Revelation 1:11, John was a companion in this tribulation and kingdom. John was suffering at the time of writing. He was in exile for the cause of Christ – vs. 9.
 - III. Consider again that Christians were suffering as this letter was being written.
 - i. Revelation 2:9 – the church at Smyrna was facing tribulation.
 - ii. Revelation 2:13 – Pergamos held fast to His name and did not deny the faith even as Antipas was killed.
 - iii. Revelation 3:10 – they had persevered and would be kept from further trials because of their faithfulness.
 - IV. What about Revelation 6-18 making no mention of the church, thus it must be raptured? That is pure speculation, as the letter is addressed to the 7 churches of Asia and what they would be enduring. Just because the church is mentioned no more by name does not mean the faithful who suffered were not part of His church (cf. Acts 2:47 – has that changed?)
 - V. The souls of faithful martyrs were crying “how long” – THEY wanted vengeance. The book of revelation is about THEIR vengeance.
 - VI. Therefore, the tribulation was THEN – including John’s immediate audience. If you include others since then, so be it – but you CANNOT leave out the suffering martyrs of that time period.
 - VII. WHAT application can we take from “the great tribulation”? We may face persecutions in this life (cf. 2 Timothy 3:12), but not how severe, in the end God wins. Man can afflict you materially, but he cannot touch your soul unless you let him. THAT is our take away from Revelation.

Truly Revelation is a challenging book. It is so challenging that some avoid it all together – they just skip it in their readings. I am here to tell you when you are troubled to read Revelation. But do so with the understanding that in the end Satan is defeated and God wins! We don’t need to try and analyze every detail of every vision (or even understand every vision), for to do so is put words in God’s mouth. Premillennialism does just that. Again, remember Revelation 22:18-19. And remember, He is coming back and that will be it. Are you ready?