

Introduction: Understanding Revelation

1. -3 Keys to interpreting Visions (Mulholland, 20-22)

- a. **The Vision experience is to be taken seriously. (John didn't make this up. This is not just a novel!)**
 - b. **You can't describe that which is indescribable. (That's why the use of similes and metaphors is used)**
 - i. **Some folks don't see this and take everything literally. (Show picture of Blake)**
 - c. **Recognize the transforming power of a vision on both the seer and the readers.**
 - i. Everything is different from then on. You can't look at everything the same way you once did.
 - ii. *Compare to the Wizard of Oz, once you say the old man, you couldn't go back to seeing the wizard!*
 - iii. "To attempt to understand the vision within the parameters of the normal world is either to tame and domesticate the vision as an instrument of the status quo or to dismiss it as abnormal."
 - iv. **Amos Wilder**, "To submit the prophets and the evangelist to the constraints of our critical methods is like trying to put lightning into a matchbox...the rights of the Spirit and the imagination are equally frustrated when we try to turn such books as Daniel and Revelation into blue prints."
2. **Recognize the book of Revelation as a vision.** It's classified as Apocalyptic literature that is usually written during dark times and the purpose is reassure the readers of the victory of God's justice and goodness. *Its sometimes referred to as Crisis literature.*
- a. **Something really rotten is going on.** Because of that, people's faith is threatened. Don't know if, when, or how to believe any more. Written in circumstances like this, World is out of kilter. Don't know what to do anymore. God is still God, has not abandoned us and is at work right now is how the author writes. Written to bring hope and a call to faithfulness, not to give up, to those who are suffering in some way..
 - b. **That's why the purpose of Apocalyptic literature is not just to tell you about the future, but its about getting you to see things differently today.** When you see differently, you live differently.
3. So, to piggy back on what we said last week. The Christians in this time was suffering, their world was becoming unwound, it seemed as if the ultimate power was the Mighty Roman Empire, that Evil was winning, and if you looked at from just that perspective, who wouldn't want to give up on their faith. *But here John is given a vision to give to the churches, and that vision tells us that God is the ultimate power, evil eventually loses, and even though we suffer now for our faith, we will be victorious through it!*
4. So as we go through this book, don't think that this is just a book telling us about the future. If you want that go pick up that National Enquirer. This book is much more than that. It's a message of hope and encouragement, mixed with warnings as well. Basic message, "Don't give up!"
5. In addition, this is also a pastoral letter. John was a leader in the church and had a pastor's heart. (know from his letters.) Imagine his feelings.

2. Interpreting Revelation

- A. The book of Revelation has been interpreted in many ways throughout history. And there is not just one agreed on interpretation.
- B. And We can disagree on the interpretation we take without being labeled as a non-believer. (*Hal Lindsey, so called "Scholars"...*)
 - a. **Justin Martyr** (believed in the coming of Christ before literal 1000 yr reign of Christ) in Dialogue with Trypho, "I am not so miserable a fellow, Trypho, as to say one thing and think another. I admitted to your formerly, that I and many others are of this opinion

(Premillennialism) and believe that such will take place, as you assuredly are aware; but on the other hand, I signified to you that many who belong to the pure and pious faith and are true Christians, think otherwise.”

b. Chuck Lee: *“A people brought together by a fact of the past, in order to be in fellowship in the present, should not divide themselves over a question of the future.”*

C. We are going to take a look at the book of Revelation by looking at the four dominant views that have been used throughout history. Again, it’s hard to say that a person strictly follows only one interpretation.

I. The Four Approaches to Interpreting the Book of Revelations

A. The Historicist Approach: Revelation Surveys the Whole of Church History

a. *Although this approach is not very popular today, it was the common held belief of many major protestants.*

- i. John Knox, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield, C.H. Spurgeon, & John Wesley
- ii. Still held by the 7th Day Adventist in the “Revelation Seminars”

b. *This belief is that God revealed the entire church age in advance through the symbolic visions of the Apocalypse.*

- i. **Example:** breaking of seals (chs. 6-7) is seen as barbarian invasions that sacked western Roman Empire; The scorpion/locust from the bottomless pit (ch 9) are the Arab hordes that attacked the Eastern Roman Empire, followed by the Turks represented as the horses with serpents for tails and flame-throwers for mouths. The beast (ch 13) is Roman papacy.

c. *A major characteristic of this is what is called the “year-for-a-day principle” which means that God revealed literal and exact time periods, but cast them in symbolism that represents a year as a day.*

- i. Based upon an understanding of **Ezekiel 4:4-6** in which the prophet was required to lie on his left side for 390 days, and upon his right side for 40 days, representing the same number of years of judgment decreed upon Israel and Judah.

d. *Some have used it and have been accurate:*

- i. *Robert Fleming in 1690 was asked by King William III on when the temporal power of the papacy would end. Fleming reply was that it would begin to end in 1794 and expire about 1848. Followers of this view point to the fact that the French Revolution’s “reign of terror” began in 1794 and the Pope was temporarily driven out from Rome in 1848.*

e. *Some object to this because of the non-negotiable view that the papacy is the “Anti-Christ”.*

- i. Source of this viewpoint is the reformers, who were not in great relations with Rome. Opponents say that they force their beliefs into the reading of the text (Remember World in front of the Text).
- ii. Others oppose it because it says that it is to flexible to interpretation. (**Compare to Nostradamus predictions**)
- iii. Another opposition is that it would mean little to the original readers to whom it was written for.
- iv. Still another opposition is that by reading the interpretations, you would be led to believe that Christianity only existed in Europe and no where else.

f. Supporters say that the other opposing views are attempts to cover up the truth about the papacy.

g. It is true that history has seemed to fit the outline of the book of Revelation, but the original supporters didn’t envision history lasting as long as it has; and many supporters cannot agree on the events that the book speaks about.

The Preterist Approach: Fulfillment is in the Past, Shortly After the Time of Writing.

h. *This belief was originally started by the Jesuit Luis de Alcasar (1554-1613) as a counter understanding to the historicist approach.*

i. The belief is that the events were fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem, and some see it in the fall of Rome, and eventually 2nd coming of Christ.

- j. *So the view says that the value of the book to us today is similar to the fulfillment of fulfilled prophecies in the Old Testament, but to the early Christians it would be a promise of soon deliverance and of vindication for those who died as martyrs.*
- k. *Point to passages like 1:1 and 1:19 which says that these things “must shortly come to pass” and “are about to take place.”*
 - i. earthquakes, famines, volcanic eruptions actually happened in late 1st century (like Pompey), and these are referred to in the book (not future ones);
 - ii. the Parthian army was poised on Rome’s eastern border (Rome could never conquer them), waiting for an opportunity to invade, and this is the “army to the east” Revelations refers to;
- l. *Compare this to the Olivet discourse in **Mark 13** (also in **Matthew 24, Luke 17, 21**). Interesting to note that John does not include this in his Gospel so some say that the book of Revelation is John’s expanded version of the Olivet Discourse.*
 - i. Point that the Olivet Discourse is given by Jesus in response to the disciples’ question concerning the timing of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.
- m. Some view this just as the fulfillment of the fall of Jerusalem; others see the first part of Revelation as the fall of Jerusalem, the second half as the fall of Rome, and the final chapters of the 2nd coming of Christ.
- n. This view is held by many scholars today.
- o. *Major problem is that the it makes Revelation wrong because these things haven’t happened!*

B. The Futurist Approach: Everything After Chapter 3 Awaits Fulfillment in the Future.

- a. *This is the predominant approach held by many today. It is so dominant that many are unaware that there are other approaches.*
- b. Those who hold this view is J.N. Darby, Scofield, Hal Lindsey, Charles Swindoll, John MacArthur, and Tim LaHaye (left behind).
- c. *Basis of this view is that the book of Revelation is divided into 3 sections which are outlined given in 1:19 where John is told to write, “the things which you have seen (Ch 1), and the things which are (Ch 2-3), and the things which shall be after these things. (Ch 4-22”*
- d. It takes a more literal approach to the book of Revelation and the symbolism for most part can be ignored.
 - i. Why can’t you have giant locust that have tails like scorpions-in the future we will have it.
 - ii. The earth has never seen where 1/3 of sea is turned to blood, killing 1/3 of fish and sinking 1/3 of ships. (Ch 16)
- e. *Yet much of the understanding of Revelation based upon this does not come from a literal understanding of Revelation.*
 - i. The rapture doesn’t come from Revelation but from 1 Thessalonians. You have to read it into the book of Rev.
 - ii. There is no mention of the Antichrist’s violation of a treaty with Israel and setting up an image of himself in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem.
- f. *This view is very popular because it helps our desire for a divinely-inspired revelation of the future and the need for understanding.*
 - i. Furthered when preachers take current events and apply book of revelations to it.
 - 1. *April 28, 1964 in AP article said that the Red Chinese had an estimated “200 million armed and organized militiamen”. The same number mentioned in Rev 9:16.*
 - 2. *Hal Lindsay wrote in 1973, “For those of us who know what the prophets have taught, picking up our morning newspaper is practically a traumatic experience. Headline after headline screams out of confirmation of these remarkable predictions.*
- g. The opponents of this viewpoint say like historicism, it makes 90% of Revelation irrelevant to the original readers.

- h. *Another opposition is that the origin of this belief is from **Francisco Ribeira**, a Spanish Jesuit, in 1854 in response to the Reformers view that the Pope was the Antichrist. Ribeira taught that the Antichrist has not come and will rise up in the “last days”. This view was rejected by Protestants for close to 200 years.*
 - i. It was introduced to protestant circles by **Samuel Maitland** in 1827 and was made popular by **J.N Darby** in Dispensationalism which was made popular by the lawyer turned preacher, John Scofield in his **Scofield Reference Bible**. Scofield started the Correspondence Bible School in Dallas, TX to teach this viewpoint, and that school continues today as Dallas Theological Seminary (Where Chuck Swindoll was president)
 - i. Later we are going to watch the film “Left Behind” which is based on this viewpoint.

C. The Spiritual Approach (Allegorical): No Single Fulfillment; Only Transcendent Principles and Recurrent Themes.

- a. *The Belief of this is that the great themes of scripture are given, themes like the triumph of good over evil, of Christ over Satan, and the vindication of the martyrs and the sovereignty of God are played out throughout Revelation without necessary reference to single historical events.*
 - i. Example: the beast from the sea is the political opposition to the church; the beast from the land is the opposition of pagan or corrupt Christianity. The harlot is the compromised church or the seduction of the world in general.
- b. *John Gager: using cultural anthropology, says Rev. functions like a myth It’s goal is to transcend the time between a real resent and a mythical future by contrasting symbols of victory (God’s throne, the new Jerusalem. Etc) with symbols of oppression (beasts, Babylon)and showing the 1st group in the courts of heaven, the 2nd the lake of fire. By giving people an experience of a blissful future, he fortifies them to endure the present.*
- c. *Holders of this viewpoint is the early Alexandrian church leaders such as Origen and St. Augustine. Origen interpreted the 7 sealed roll as scripture, the white horse rider represent the opening of heaven by the Divine word through the white light of knowledge which he imparts to believers.*

D. My Approach to the Book of Revelation: Combined view where Scripture has Dual Meaning.

- a. It is sort of like the way the verse from **Isaiah 7:14** which talks about the virgin giving birth to a child and naming the child Immanuel. That verse in its context in Isaiah speaks nothing of the Messiah being born to Mary and being the Son of God, but when Matthew uses the verse it takes on a different meaning.
- b. With this approach one can see the intent of John and the lessons gathered from the early Christians and what they were enduring, and at the same time one can get a glimpse of what lies ahead and the comfort, encouragement, and perhaps even warnings that text might bring.
- c. This way, there was value to the original readers and also great value to us today.
- d. As with all approaches, this one has many flaws. One could easily misinterpret a text to the present day and time and see the world as ending tomorrow. In addition, one could read the text and see more that is there than what truly is there.

II. Things to Look For in the Book of Revelation

A. The Use of Language

- a. **Metaphor**-an opening o a realm of significance that can't be expressed literally but engages the imagination in cognitive and affective explorations of the subject in and through relationships that seem strange but actually are illuminating (metaphors bring to expression that which cannot be communicated by literal speech).
 - i. 1:14: "His eyes were like blazing fire, feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace and his oive was like the sound of rushing water"
- b. **Symbols**- More than a sign, a symbol is a mode of presence of something that can't be encountered any other way; it participates directly in the presence and power of that which it symbolizes; it embodies and brings to expression a reality which cannot be fully said.
 - i. Use of the # 7. Seven is symbolic of perfection.

B. The Coming of Christ

- a. The meaning of the word quickly. Some mean that the word means that he is coming soon, others say that it means He is coming suddenly. Some see it to mean the temporal judgment upon certain nations.

C. The Most Controversial Topic of Revelation Throughout History

- a. The Issue of the Millennium
 - i. Comes from Rev 20 and the 1000 years
- b. **Premillennialism**-belief that the second coming of Christ will precede the millennium kingdom.
 - i. Christ will reign with saints before the establishment of the eternal heaven and earth.
 - ii. Accused of having a pessamestic view of future
 - 1. Tell story of Bonnie Mills saying if things will just get worse why bother trying.
 - iii. Most commonly held by the Futurist
- c. **Postmillennialism**- teaches that Christ returns after the 1000 years.
 - i. Kingdom will be established through evangelism and will be successful to where there will be peace.
 - ii. During that time, not all will be Christian, and there will be a revolt at the end and Christ will return to put an end to it.
 - iii. Held by the likes of Jonathan Edwards and others and is growing in popularity in circles today.
- d. **Amillennialism**-understands the 1000 years to symbolize an indefinitely long period of time, which happens to correspond to the entire span of time from the first coming of Christ until the second.