

Chapter 13

The Revelation: Image of Judgement and Hope

Opening

- No one should approach Revelation without a proper degree of humility
 - ◊ It is not an easy book, and we should be less than dogmatic here
- Exegesis is especially important
 - ◊ We must first find the original meaning before jumping to the meaning for today

The Nature of Revelation

- Revelation is unique, finely blended combination of three distinct literary types
 - ◊ Apocalypse, Prophecy, and Letter

The Revelation as Apocalypse

- Apocalypse is a literary form that does not exist today
- Revelation is primarily apocalyptic
 - ◊ Apocalypses seldom intended to give a detailed chronological account of the future
- There were dozens of Apocalypses that were well-known to Jews and Christians that were written between 200 BC and 200 AD
 - ◊ Although Revelation is the only one that is the Word of God
 - ◊ They all came in a variety of kinds, yet all had some common characteristics that are good to understand
- 1. The taproot of apocalyptic literature is the Old Testament prophetic literature, especially Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and parts of Isaiah
- 2. Apocalypses are literary works from the beginning
 - ◊ It has a particular written structure and form
 - ◊ Remember prophetic books were given orally first
 - ◊ Revelation 1:19, "Therefore write what you have seen, what is, and what will take place after this."

- 3. Most frequently the content of apocalyptic is presented in the form of visions and dreams, and its language is cryptic and symbolic
- 4. The Images of apocalyptic are often forms of fantasy rather than reality
- 5. Because they were literary, most were very formally stylized
- The Revelation of John fits all of these characteristics

The Revelation as Prophecy

- John clearly intends this apocalypse to be prophetic word to the church
- It is different from most apocalyptic and prophetic writings because John knew the end had already begun
 - ◊ Jesus has come, and the Spirit is leading Him to write this
- This book is born in persecution and intends to speak about the end with the triumph of Christ and His church, and it is a carefully constructed piece of literature, using cryptic language and rich symbolism of fantasy and numbers

The Revelation as Epistle

- Even though it is apocalyptic and prophetic it was cast in the form of a letter
 - ◊ Revelation 1:4-6, "John: To the seven churches in Asia. Grace and peace to you from the One who is, who was, and who is coming; from the seven spirits before His throne; and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kinds of the earth.
To Him who loves us and has set us free from our sins by His blood, and made us a kingdom, Priests to His God and Father --- the glory and dominion are His forever and ever. Amen."
- There is also an occasional aspect to Revelation like the epistles

The Necessity of Exegesis

- The primary meaning of Revelation is what John intended it to be
 - ◊ It is something that his readers could have understood

- Because it is a prophetic book, it could also have a second meaning, inspired by the Holy Spirit but not fully seen by the author or his readers
- When John himself interprets his images, these interpreted images must be held firmly and must serve as a starting point for understanding other images
- One must see the visions as wholes and not allegorically press all the details

The Historical Context

- We must read for the big picture
- The main themes are:
 - ◊ The church and state are on a collision course
 - ◊ The initial victory will appear to belong to the state
 - ◊ God will finally pour out His wrath on those who cause this suffering and death and bring eternal rest to those who remain faithful

Some Final Thoughts

- Until Christ comes, we live out the future in the already, and we do so by hearing and obeying His Word
- Revelation was born in persecution and intends to speak about the end with the triumph of Christ and His church, and it is a carefully constructed piece of literature, using cryptic language and rich symbolism of fantasy and numbers