

the end...

exploring the book of Revelation.
questions answered.
and more questions raised.

Purpose: *To explore the book of Revelation as a group, and to enlighten teenagers to the ideas that Revelation can be interpreted in a number of ways, none of which are salvation issues.*

Introduction

Welcome to The End. I would like to start out by pointing out that the book we are going to be going over, Revelation, is singular. It is Revelation, not the book of Revelations. It is filled with smaller Revelations, but is one large Revelation. By the way, does anyone know what Revelation means? Literally translated, it means revealing. A revelation is something that God reveals to us.

Open Forum: What do YOU know?

Invite teens to share their knowledge of Revelation. What do they know about it? What have they been told? How often do they read it?

Revelation History

Who wrote it? John (yes, that John, the apostle). There is some debate that it was another John, but so far John the Apostle has been the most reliable author.

When was it written? Either 68, 69 AD or 95, 96 AD. The date is still debated to this day.

Where was it written? While John was on the Island of Patmos, exiled there by the Roman government.

How did the author decide to write the book? God gave John a vision to share with the churches. That vision is the book of Revelation.

Why was it written? As a letter of comfort to the early church.

Revelation Styling

There are at least two different styles of writing found in Revelation. Why is this important to know? Did you even know that there are different writing styles in Scripture? This is important to know because how things are written determines how they are read and, ultimately, understood and translated. The two main types found in Revelation are Epistle and Jewish Apocalyptic. Let's start with Epistle.

What is an Epistle? A letter to a person or a church that has been included in the canon of Scripture. It's a letter that an apostle wrote to a church in the first century in other words. Give me some examples of Epistles. (Any of the New Testament books from Romans through Jude will be acceptable). Yes. These are all examples of Epistles. There are a few separate, yet unified Epistles in Revelation. Chapters 2 and 3 are both written to seven different churches that were in existence at the time of this book being written. Epistles are usually filled with reminders and teaching that would instruct the readers in how to remain in the Spirit of God, and possibly encouragements or condemnation for how they were doing to this point.

Jewish Apocalyptic on the other hand, is a little bit tougher to get a handle on. First let's define Apocalypse since that is the fuller word at play here. What does Apocalypse mean?

From Webster's: A Great Disaster OR one of the Jewish and Christian writings of 200BC to AD 150 marked by pseudonymity, symbolic imagery, and the expectation of an imminent cosmic cataclysm in which God destroys the ruling powers of evil and raises the righteous to life in a messianic Kingdom.

In short, Jewish Apocalyptic literature would center around a lot of imagery that was easy to picture, but not always easy to understand unless you knew what you were looking for. The original recipients of these types of letters knew what to look for. In fact, if you look through Revelation you will see a lot of images that took place in Daniel and other Old Testament books as well. It could be considered a sort of code should someone in power who did not know how to read it get hold of the letter as it was being circulated.

Jewish Apocalyptic literature has not been used in well over 1,500 years. It would be like destroying all copies of the Spider-Man trilogy except for a couple of the DVD's, burying them in a crate, and exhuming them 1,000 years later. In and of themselves, they are hard to understand. Are they real? Are they figurative? Did these things already happen? It is an incomplete analogy (as most are), but it can be helpful to see that Jewish Apocalyptic literature is virtually impossible to completely understand today.

And by the way. Jewish Apocalyptic literature doesn't just show up in Revelation. It also shows up in Isaiah, Joel, Zechariah, Ezekiel, Large chunks of Daniel, and even a little bit in Matthew.

Revelation Through the Lenses

Keeping all of this in mind, how do we go about interpreting Revelation? Well, no matter how you try, you could be welcomed by many people. There are actually 4 main thoughts on how to interpret Revelation.

The Historic Method

Within the Historic Method of interpreting Revelation basically looks at Revelation's prophecies as coming true over the course of what is known as the Church Age. This means that some of them have come true, and others not yet. In this method, the book's prophecies take place between the first coming of Christ and the time He comes back to reclaim us all.

Arguments FOR this method:

- This is the most predominant method of interpreting throughout the ages.
- From here, a lot of the prophecies can be viewed as having come true.

Arguments AGAINST this method:

- If this is true, it would have meant nothing to the original recipients.
- No one can agree on which prophecies have come true and which ones have yet to come pass.
- There is a tendency to see history (the book of Revelation) complete in our own time.
- There is a tendency to see things only in the perspective of Western (English and American) church history, ruling out the original recipients and the church in cultures that are not from the West.

The Preterist Method

Within the Preterist Method of interpreting Revelation, virtually all of the prophecies came to pass around 70 AD. Save for the last couple of chapters, everything in the book already happened.

Arguments FOR this method:

- There is an immediate relevance for the original recipients. The persecution spoken of is happening to them at that time, and culminates in their very near future.
- It reflects with many non-Christian historical accounts of the time of the destruction of Jerusalem around 70 AD.

- It parallels the words of Christ in the Olivet Discourse (The Sermon on the Mount) from the 3 Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) when He foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Arguments AGAINST this method:

- This method is almost entirely dependent upon Revelation being written prior to 70 AD, which is debatable to this day.

The Idealist Method

Within the Idealist Method of interpreting Revelation, the reader does not look for specific fulfillment of the prophecies. It instead views Revelation as spiritual lessons and principals that reoccur throughout history. It is merely a look at the reality of Spiritual Warfare in our midst, and an encouragement that in the end Jesus will fix everything.

Arguments FOR this method:

- This makes the book applicable to every person throughout all of history.
- It makes it unnecessary to look for specific fulfillment of all the prophecies contained in Revelation.

Arguments AGAINST this method:

- The Book of Revelation states in the opening chapter that it deals with specific events that would soon take place.

The Futurist Method

Within the Futurist Method of interpreting Revelation, the book is viewed (largely) as a whole of prophecies that have yet to be fulfilled. Many Futurists even view the letters to the seven churches as being time periods, not literal churches. The belief also states that the prophecies unfold in chronological order.

Arguments FOR this method:

- It is currently the most widely-held method of interpreting Revelation.
- The position claims to interpret Revelation literally, which is usually a good thing when interpreting Revelation.

Arguments AGAINST this method:

- When interpreting Revelation literally, this view takes it too far, virtually hyper-literalizing the prophecies, claiming to understand more than humans are capable of when it comes to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature.
- Viewing the prophecies as all being in the future makes this book inapplicable to any Christian except for those reading it just before Jesus comes back, especially those who it was written to in the first place. By this understanding we don't even need to read it because when it happens, we will already be gone.
- There is a great danger in subjective interpretation. Every decade can claim that it was to be the one that Jesus would come back because Revelation prophecies were being fulfilled.
- It gets its roots from a Jesuit monk (catholic) who claimed the antichrist was a future conqueror because the reformers (Preterists) were claiming that the papacy (The Catholic church) was antichrist.
- There are numerous Christological and covenantal issues that cannot be reconciled within this method.

Revelation: The End

In the end, all of these views have strengths and weaknesses. Some more than others. But in each one, we have to remember that to accurately interpret Scripture, we have to exegete first. Exegesis is finding out what

it meant to the original readers. We cannot interpret Scripture properly or accurately apart from this, and if we do we are going to be incredibly wrong.

The beauty of Revelation is that no matter how you interpret it, it is not a Salvation issue. God will not condemn you to hell just for getting it wrong. But remember not to make too much of an issue of it. Don't major on the minors here. Every method of interpreting Revelation ultimately says Jesus comes back and fixes everything, which is Scriptural.

Over the next two weeks we will be diving in and looking at several key passages in Revelation. We will attempt to make some sense of it all.

Fun Revelation words:

Eschaton – The Last Things

Eschatology – The study of The Last Things