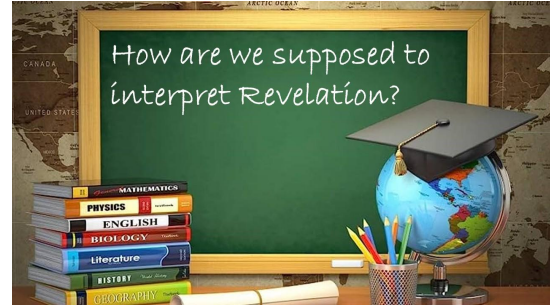


It's Up to You 2023 (Week 6): How are we supposed to interpret Revelation?

Yesterday's Sermon - In 10 Sentences or Less



1) American Christians tend to have one of two polar opposite reactions to the book of Revelation: we are either scared of it, and thereby avoid it altogether, or we put far too much weight on it, deriving all kinds of strange doctrines or ideas from it.

2) The book of Revelation is an "apocalypse," a fairly common kind of Jewish and Christian spiritual writing from 400 BC to 200 AD, so though it seems bizarre to us it wouldn't have been to its original audience.

3) An "apocalypse" is a visionary and/or mystical genre, claiming to pull back the curtain on what's currently happening to show us things from a heavenly point of view.

4) There are at least four key facets to interpreting the apocalypse we call Revelation as it was originally intended, the first of which is to read it as a work of poetry.

5) Given that most of us in the modern world don't read or write poetry anymore, we need to remember that a poem is an evocative form of literature, meant to move our hearts and spark our imagination (so it's less blueprint and more symphony, less museum of science and more museum of art).

6) Second, Revelation as an apocalypse is a heavily, if not entirely, symbolic work, and those symbols are drawn primarily from the Old Testament and the Greco-Roman world (the two examples we looked at yesterday are Rev. 2.17 and 21.16, 22).

7) Third, Revelation is a book that employs a Jewish and early Christian view of history called typology, in which a) history is seen as a timeless struggle between God and those who oppose His purposes and justice, and b) history is marked by patterns, themes, images, or ideas that repeat themselves.

8) As an example of typology in Revelation, consider the great whore riding on the beast in Revelation 17-18 (specifically from yesterday, 17.3, 5-6): the woman is clearly a symbol of Rome, who is actively persecuting the early Christians, but Rome is said to be a recurrence of Babylon, a great enemy of God's people in the Old Testament, both of whom were allied with the timeless forces of evil and chaos symbolized by the beast on which they ride.

9) A fourth and final way to read Revelation as it was intended is to remember its readers, namely that they were under tremendous duress at the hands of Rome and the book is written to help them endure and outlast those who oppose them.

10) Thus, Revelation as an apocalypse is NOT propositional, literal, predictive, primarily about the future, focused exclusively on one time frame, and not directly about our own culture and setting primarily (this is an important reminder because many of the popular treatments of the end times in recent American Christianity, like *The Late Great Planet Earth* in the 1970s or *The Left Behind* series, commit most, if not all, of these interpretive errors.)

The Meaning of Revelation for its Readers, Including Us

We finished yesterday's sermon listening to how some of the great American New Testament scholars of our day describe the prevailing message or takeaway of this most remarkable book, both for its first audience and us 2000 years later:

Scot McKnight, Northern Seminary): The dragon and beast seduce humans to worship the wild things and thereby reject worship of the Lamb and God on the throne...As Christians, we are to walk in the light that liberates us from the ways of the beast and empowers us to be faithful witnesses...Too many settle for the way of the dragon, justifying it as the "way of the world."

Richard Hays (Duke Divinity School): This work (Revelation) places the Lamb that was slaughtered at the center of its worship and praise...As a paradigm for the action of the faithful community, Jesus stands as the faithful witness who conquers through suffering, even suffering to the point of death.

P. D. Hanson (Yale Divinity School): Revelation places the oppressor face to face with the ultimate Power who is their Judge and to whom they must account for their action...Evil will not prevail in the end. To believe otherwise would undermine the hope and courage that has characterized the lives of the saints throughout our religious history.

Michael Gorman (St. Mary's Seminary): We bear witness to a certain future. But we know that only God can bring that final, future reality to earth, as we constantly pray, "Come, Lord Jesus." The beauty of hope in Revelation is that it is both personal and global, even cosmic...At the end of the day – and at the end of the Bible itself – is unquenchable, undeterrable hope.

Explore More this Week

- Try reading some of Revelation this week, at the least read it as poetry and pay attention to how it affects your feelings and/or imagination (and if you pick up on some of the Old Testament symbols, all the better): [Rev 1 NRSVUE](#)

- Curious about other ancient apocalypses? Check out The Shepherd of Hermas, a non-biblical Christian apocalypse written between 100-150 AD (so only 50-60 years after the New Testament era)...it's long, coming in over 100 pages, so just read a little to get a taste of it, if you like): [Book-5-hermas-for-website.pdf](#)

- Here are the two books now available in the KW library, which will reiterate and expand on what we presented yesterday but also help you read the heavily-symbolic Revelation in a more informed way:

- [Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation: Gorman, Michael J.](#)
- [Revelation for the Rest of Us: A Prophetic Call to Follow Jesus as a Dissident Disciple: McKnight, Scot, Matchett, Cody](#)

- Here's a short summary of the Michael Gorman book listed above, just to give you a sense of what's in it: [Gorman's READING REVELATION RESPONSIBLY | Nijay Gupta](#)

- A six minute video from biblical scholar N. T. Wright on how to read Revelation well...and not so well: [N.T. Wright: The book of Revelation & what we get wrong](#)

- An eight minute video interview with one of the world's great scholars on Revelation, Dr. Richard Bauckham: [The Book of Revelation with Richard Bauckham and Ben Witherington](#)

- Here are two 40-60 minute interviews with the authors of the books recommended above, you'll get a good sense of what the books cover by listening to these:

- [Revelation for the Rest of Us: An Interview with Scot McKnight](#)
- [Michael J. Gorman - Reading Revelation Responsibly](#)

- Two critiques of the Left Behind series misreading of Revelation, the 1st focuses on the issue of the alleged "rapture", and the 2nd is a little more substantial from a Yale University publication, written by a Christian journalist:

- [Ministry Matters™ | Why 'Left Behind' should be... left behind](#)
- [Revelation's Warning to Evangelicals: Left Behind May Be Hazardous to Our Health | Reflections \(yale.edu\)](#)