

APOCALYPSE OF JOHN

Session 23: Review and Epilogue (Revelation 22:7-21)

STRUCTURE AND OVERVIEW OF JOHN'S APOCALYPSE:

A. Context:

- A.D. 95-96, seven churches in Roman province of Asia
- Extreme pressure to worship Emperor Domitian and the Roman gods in place of the Creator God/Christ
- In exile on the island of Patmos, the Apostle John receives a revelation from Christ

B. Structure of John's Revelation:

"Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later." (Rev 1:19)

"After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.'" (Rev 4:1)

"The angel said to me, 'These words are trust-worthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.'" (Rev 22:6)

1. Prologue (Rev. 1:1-20)

- How John received the revelation through a vision of the risen Christ
- Form of apocalypse with heavy use of symbolism: He "signed" it to him

2. Part I: The Revelation of "what is "now" [PRESENT] (Rev. 2:1-3:22)

- Letters to the seven churches reflect context and offer commendation and correction from Jesus
- Promises to those who "overcome" by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and remaining faithful to death

3. Part II: The Revelation of "what must take place after this" [FUTURE] (Rev. 4:1-22:6)

a. Introduction: John's Heavenly Vantage Point (Rev. 4:1-5:14)

- Future seen from God's point of view
- Only the Lion of Judah and the Lamb Who Was Slain can open the scroll with seven seals (God's redemptive will) and put it into effect

b. First Vision of the Future (Rev. 6:1-8:1):

Theme: The Lamb opens the seven seals to implement God's redemptive will

- Seals 1-5: Labor Pains (four horsemen and souls of martyrs)
- Seal 6: Final Judgment and end of world as we know it
- Interlude: Sealing of 144,000 (all God's covenant people), marking them for salvation
- Seal 7: Return to primeval silence anticipates the New Creation

c. Second Vision of the Future (Rev. 8:2-11:19)

Theme: God's coming Kingship as a "Second Exodus" for God's people

- Trumpets 1-6: Labor pains likened to Exodus plagues
- Interlude: Measuring of Temple and Two Witnesses (God's covenant people)
- Trumpet 7: Final Judgment and Consummation likened to Israel entering God's presence (ark of the covenant) at Sinai

d. Third Vision of the Future (Rev. 12:1-22:6)

Theme: God's coming Kingship as a "Second Release from Babylonian Captivity"

- The Labor Pains as the dragon (Satan) making war against the male child (Christ) and the rest of the woman's offspring (Christians) sometimes through the beast from the sea (political powers aligned with Satan) and the beast from the land (religious powers supporting the political powers)
- Images of the Final Judgment and Consummation, which bring the salvation of God's covenant people and the destruction of his enemies
 - Salvation: The song of the redeemed and announcement of the Final Judgment
 - Destruction: The harvest of the earth and the grapes of wrath
 - Destruction: The seven last plagues or seven bowls of God's wrath
 - Destruction: The fall of Babylon
 - Salvation: The wedding supper of the Lamb
 - Destruction: The victorious Christ and great supper of God
 - Destruction and Salvation: Release from Captivity in Babylon (Rome) to the New Jerusalem (the Consummated Kingship of God), which is a Temple (the community of God's covenant people forever in His presence)—Revelation 17:1-22:6 patterned after Ezekiel 37-48

4. Epilogue (Rev. 22:7-21)

EPILOGUE (Revelation 22:7-21)

⁷"Behold (*idou*), I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

⁸I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. ⁹But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

¹⁰Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near.

But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. (Daniel 12:4a; compare Revelation 10)

¹¹Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."

Three Possible Meanings:

- (1) But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you shall say to them, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says." Whoever will listen let him listen, and whoever will refuse let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house. (Ezekiel 3:27)
- (2) Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand. (Daniel 12:10)
- (3) He who has ears, let him hear. (Matthew 13:9 and elsewhere)

Blessed are those *who wash their robes*, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. (Revelation 22:14)

¹²"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. ¹³I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

¹⁴"Blessed are those who wash their robes (compare Revelation 19:8), that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. ¹⁵Outside are the dogs (compare Matthew 15:21-28 // Mark 7:24-30; Philippians 3:2), those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

¹⁶"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

¹⁷The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

¹⁸I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. ¹⁹And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

³¹⁰As the books were read, the priests stood up, with the elders from among the translators and from the representatives of the "Community," and with the leaders of the people, and said, "Since this version has been made rightly and reverently, and in every respect accurately, it is good that this should remain exactly so, and that there should be no revision." ³¹¹There was general approval of what they said, and they commanded that a curse should be laid, as was their custom, on anyone who should alter the version by any addition or change to any part of the written text, or any deletion either. This was a good step taken, to ensure that the words were preserved completely and permanently in perpetuity. (Letter of Aristeas 310-311 (compare Deuteronomy 4:1-2))

**²⁰He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

²¹The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

REFLECTIONS

Comparison of Millennial Views

This information was excerpted from *For He Must Reign: An Introduction to Reformed Eschatology* by Kim Riddlebarger.
Downloaded on November 5, 2020 from https://www.fivesolas.com/esc_chrt.htm

DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIALISM

Overview—Distinctive Features and Emphases

- a. Dispensationalists argue for the necessity of the literal interpretation of all of the prophetic portions of Scripture. Charles Ryrie makes this point very clearly:
When the principles of literal interpretation both in regard to general and special hermeneutics are followed, the result is the premillennial system of doctrine... If one interprets literally, he arrives at the premillennial system.
This means that all promises made to David and Abraham under the Old Covenant are to be literally fulfilled in the future millennial age.
- b. Dispensationalists insist that God has two redemptive plans, one for national Israel, and one for Gentiles during the "church age." This presupposition forms the basis for the dispensational hermeneutic. As John Walvoord states regarding the dispensational hermeneutic, "Pretribulationism distinguishes clearly between Israel and the church and their respective programs."
- c. There is a "rapture" of believers when Jesus Christ secretly returns to earth before the seven year tribulation period begins (the seventieth week of Daniel, cf. Daniel 9:24-27). Believers do not experience the persecution of the Anti-Christ who rises to prominence during this "tribulation period." The Biblical data dealing with the time of tribulation is referring to unbelieving Israel, not the church. Therefore, church age, or the "age of grace," is to be seen as that period of time in which God is dealing with Gentiles prior to the coming of the kingdom of God during the millennium.
- d. The visible and physical second coming of Christ occurs after the great tribulation. Those who are converted to Christ during the tribulation, including Jews (the 144,000) who turn to Christ, go on into the millennium to repopulate the earth. Glorified believers rule with Christ during his future reign.
- e. Jesus came to earth bringing with him an "offer" of the kingdom to the Jews, who rejected him. God then turned to dealing with the Gentiles -- thus, the church age is a parenthesis of sorts. The rapture is the next event to occur in Biblical prophecy. The signs of the end of the age (i.e., the birth of the nation of Israel, the revival of the Roman empire predicted in Daniel as seen through the emergence of the EEC [common market], the impending Russian-Arab invasion of Israel, etc.) all point to the immediacy of the secret return of Christ for his church. Antichrist is awaiting his revelation once the believing church is removed.
- f. The millennium is marked by a return to Old Testament temple worship and sacrifice to commemorate the sacrifice of Christ. At the end of the millennium, the "great white throne" judgement occurs, and Satan and all unbelievers are cast into the lake of fire. There is the creation of a new heaven and earth.

Leading Proponents

- a. Dispensationalism was largely popularized through the Scofield Reference Bible, and is now represented, for example, by the notes in the Ryrie Study Bible. Hal Lindsey's book, *The Late Great Planet Earth* served to keep the movement in the mainstream of Evangelicalism in the late 60's and early 70's. The vast majority of the early Charismatic movement was dispensational in its orientation even though most dispensationalists emphasized that charismata ceased with the completion of the New Testament. As the Charismatic movement has matured and become more consistent in its own theology, dispensationalism has largely been jettisoned. Because of this, and because of the resurgence of questions of ethics (the dispensationalist cannot efficiently use his OT to answer ethical questions) dispensationalism is apparently on the decline.
- b. Leading dispensational theologians include John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, J. Dwight Pentecost, Norman Geisler and Charles Feinberg. Popular dispensational pastors and writers include; Charles Swindoll, Dave Hunt, Jack Van Impe and Charles Stan Chuck Smith and the Calvary Chapel movement represent the Charismatic side of dispensationalism.

c. Dallas Theological Seminary is the leading dispensational institution. Other dispensational institutions include: Talbot Theological Seminary, the Master's College and Grace Theological Seminary.

Bibliography

The standard dispensational textbook is J. Dwight Pentecost's Things to Come (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978). Other important works include: Charles Ryrie, The Basis of the Premillennial Faith (New York: The Loizeaux Brothers, 1953); Charles Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977); John Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1983), and John F. Walvoord, The Rapture Question (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1979). In addition, John Walvoord has authored an updated work incorporating all of his popular writings; Major Bible Prophecies (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1991).

HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM

Overview—Distinctive Features and Emphases

- a. While often popularly confused with "dispensational premillennialism" with but a mere disagreement as to the timing of the "rapture," historic premillennialism is, in actuality, a completely different eschatological system, largely rejecting the whole dispensational understanding of redemptive history.
- b. The basic features of historic premillennialism are as follows. When Jesus began his public ministry the kingdom of God was manifest through His ministry. Upon His ascension into heaven and the "Gift of the Spirit" at Pentecost, the kingdom is present through the Spirit, until the end of the age, which is marked by the return of Christ to the earth in judgement. During the period immediately preceding the return of Christ, there is great apostasy and tribulation.
- c. After the return of Christ, there will be a period of 1000 years (the millennium separating the "first" resurrection from the "second" resurrection. Satan will be bound, and the kingdom will be consummated, that is, made visible during this period.
- d. At the end of the millennial period, Satan will be loosed and there will be a massive rebellion (of "Gog and Magog"), immediately preceding the "second" resurrection or final judgement. After this, there will be the creation of a new Heaven and Earth.

Leading Proponents

- a. Without question, the best and most influential historic premillennialist was the late George Eldon Ladd of Fuller Theological Seminary. Through the work of Ladd, historic premillennialism gained scholarly respect and popularity among Evangelical and Reformed theologians. Other major historic premillennialists include the late Walter Martin, John Warwick Montgomery, J. Barton Payne, Henry Alford (the noted Greek scholar), and Theodore Zahn (the German NT specialist). The best examples of current historical premillennial work would be the many scholars of the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Evangelical Free).
- b. Historic premillennialism draws its name from the fact that many of the early Church Fathers (i.e. Irenaeus [140-203], who as a disciple of Polycarp, who had been an disciple of the apostle of John, Justin Martyr [100-165], and Papias [80-155]), apparently believed and taught that there would be a visible kingdom of God upon the earth, after the return of Christ.
- c. Several major Evangelical seminaries have some historic premillennial representation such as Fuller and Trinity. Surprisingly, a number of the faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis (a Reformed institution), held to a covenantal form of premillennialism—J.O. Buswell, J. Barton Payne and R. Laird Harris. However, all of these men have recently departed for glory, and the Reformed varieties of premillennialism are probably gone with them.

Bibliography

The best of all the historic premillennial writers was the late George E Ladd. See his works on the subject: A Commentary on the Revelation (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), The Presence of the Future (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), The Last Things (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), and The Gospel of the

Kingdom (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981). Also very helpful is Robert Duncan Culver's Daniel and the Latter Days (Chicago: The Moody Press, 1977). This is the single best defense of historic premillennialism against the amillennial critique. See also J. Barton Payne's Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980). Another important work defending the Biblical basis for premillennialism is, Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend, eds., A Case For Premillennialism: A New Consensus (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992).

POSTMILLENNIALISM

Overview—Distinctive Features and Emphases

- a. Generally speaking, postmillennialists affirm that the millennium is a period of one thousand years of universal peace and righteousness in this world, which precedes the return of Jesus Christ to earth in judgement. Postmillennialists are divided as to whether or not the period of time is a literal one thousand years, and whether or not the millennial age begins abruptly or gradually. Some see the millennial age as entirely future, others argue that it may have already begun to gradually emerge. Postmillennialists also disagree as to the events that mark the beginning of the millennial age, such as the conversion of Israel (Romans 9-11), the binding of Satan (Revelation 20), and the defeat of Antichrist.
- b. Postmillennialism is in one sense the historic position of the church since the days of St. Augustine. Since all amillennial Christians (to be discussed below) are also technically postmillennial in their understanding of the millennium, (though self-consciously "postmillennial" Christians cannot not be "amillennial" in any sense) and since the term "amillennialism" was not coined until after the beginning of the twentieth century, it was common for Protestant dogmaticians to speak of the contrast between "pre" and "post" millennialism, without distinguishing between "a" and "post" millennialism. Therefore, the difference between amillennial and postmillennial Christians centers upon the character and length of the millennial age. Postmillennialists see the millennial age as commencing at some point during the present age, and as a period in which the kingdom of God triumphs over the kingdoms of this world. Amillennial Christians see the millennial age as occupying the entire period of time between the first and second coming Christ. Generally speaking, amillennial Christians see the millennial age as one of both the triumph of the spiritual kingdom of God and the corresponding rise of evil in opposition.
- c. According to postmillennialists, there will be universal preaching and acceptance of the Gospel, and a complete and total victory of the kingdom of God, over the forces of Satan and unbelief. Postmillennialism is an optimistic eschatology of the victory grace of God in subduing evil in the world. During this period Satan will be effectually bound by the triumph of grace. Israel be converted somewhere near the beginning of the millennial. Postmillennialists do disagree however, about the nature and details of these events.
- d. At the end of the millennial period, Satan will be released the period of great tribulation and the apostasy described in Revelation 20 occurs, culminating in Gog and Magog and the Battle of Armageddon. Christ then returns in judgement (the "great throne judgement"), the resurrection occurs, and there is the creation of a new heaven and earth.

Leading Proponents

- a. Postmillennialism was popular among American Evangelicals in the period of unprecedented technological growth between 1870 and 1915. World War I largely served to squash the tremendous optimism regarding the growth of technology and the related optimism about the future of man, which was carried over in church in the form of an optimistic eschatology. Many Reformed theologians of this period are generally considered postmillennial, including the "Old-Princetonians," Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, and B. B. Warfield.
- b. Recently, postmillennialism has seen a resurgence, with the rise of Christian reconstructionism and theonomy. In addition, there is mass confusion generated by critics of postmillennialism, such as Dave Hunt and Hal Lindsey, who portray the movement as taking two quite different and confusing forms -- that of "Theonomy," and that of "Dominion Theology." Thus many Evangelicals fail to see these two forms as distinct and divergent movements. Setting out the differences between the two forms then is helpful.

1. The "theonomic" form of postmillennialism was initially presented by J. Marcellus Kik, and reworked into a full-blown ethical system known as "theonomy" or "reconstructionism" by R. J. Rushdoony. The business of the church was to work to see a theocracy restored upon the earth by emphasizing the continuity of OT law (civil, ceremonial and moral) with the NT. Once established, this victorious church would be the divine vehicle from which the ever advancing kingdom of God would bind Satan and subdue all evil in the world. The emphasis of theonomic postmillennialism is that it is God who exercises dominion through his church establishing His law as the law of the land. Other theologians in the postmillennial theonomic movement are, the late Greg Bahnsen, Ray Sutton and Gary North. Popular writers include Gary DeMarr, Kenneth Gentry, and Peter J. Leithart.
2. The "dominion" form of postmillennialism (though not all "dominion" advocates are postmillennial) is exclusively Pentecostal. This form believes the charismatic revival "Latter Rain") is God's means of binding Satan and allowing the Spirit-lead church to reclaim material possessions and wealth, which had been surrendered to unbelief and the kingdom of Satan. Once the Church understands its role and potential for dominion, through the work of the Spirit, be able to establish the kingdom of God on earth in its fullness, thereby bringing in a millennial age. The emphasis here is that it is the believer who must learn to exercise dominion if he is to take part in the advancing kingdom. Bishop Earl Paulk, Paul Yongli Cho and perhaps Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagin and Pat Robertson.
- c. The older form of postmillennialism, as practiced by Reformed theologians such as Hodge and Warfield, has little in common in emphasis with the modern theonomic approach to eschatology, which emphasizes the rise of a theocracy as the vehicle of dominion. The modern form raises serious questions about the Reformed understanding of the distinction between law and gospel. The result in many circles is a peculiar hybrid, (a tertium quid, if you will) with a propensity for making strange bed-fellows.

Bibliography

Standard classical Reformed postmillennial works are: Lorraine Boettner, The Millennium (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed publishing Company, 1957); Roderick Campbell, Israel and the New Covenant (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1954); Marcellus J. Kik, An Eschatology of Victory (Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1974). A classic expression of the older form of "postmillennialism" is found in the recently reprinted work; David Brown, Christ's Second Coming: Will It Be Premillennial? (Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 1990).

AMILLENNIALISM

Overview—Distinctive Features and Emphases

- a. The "a" millennial (literally meaning "no" millennium) position is the eschatological view of historic Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed Christianity. It would be my educated guess that about two-thirds of the Christian family espouse an amillennial eschatology. The amillennial position is as well the position of the vast majority of Reformed and Lutheran theologians. The position portrayed in these lectures is the Reformed understanding of amillennialism, which is better understood as "present" millennialism [or "realized" millennialism], since Reformed eschatology argues for a real, present, though "invisible" non-spatial millennium.
- b. Amillennialists insist that the promises made to national Israel, David and Abraham, in the OT are fulfilled by Christ and the Church during this age, which is the millennium, that is the entire period of time between the two advents of our Lord. The "thousand years" are therefore symbolic of the entire inter-advental age. Satan is bound by Christ's victory over him and the establishment of the kingdom of God via the preaching of the gospel, and Satan is no longer free to deceive the nations, through the presence of Christ is reigning in heaven during this period with the martyrs who come out of the great tribulation. At the end of the millennial age, Christ returns in judgement of all men. The general resurrection occurs, final judgement takes place for all men and women, and a new Heaven and Earth are established.

- c. In most forms of amillennialism, immediately before the return of Christ, Satan is unbound, there is a great apostasy, and a time of unprecedented satanically inspired evil. This last Satanic gasp and subsequent rebellious activity is destroyed by our Lord at his return.

Leading Proponents

- a. Amillennialism has always been the majority position of the Christian family. It was first articulated by St. Augustine, and has been given a distinctive Reformed emphasis through the work of Geerhardus Vos (the "Biblical-Theological" approach). As the "dispensational" movement captured the hearts and minds of conservative American Evangelicals, amillennialism was equated with "liberalism" or Roman Catholicism. The supposed interpreting prophecy "spiritually" or "not-literally" has led to the rejection of amillennialism by many. In addition, amillennialism suffered greatly from the failure of Reformed and Lutheran writers to defend the position against the likes of Dave Hunt, Chuck Missler and Hal Lindsey, who has labeled the position as "demonic and heretical," and the root of modern anti-semitism.
- b. Leading contemporary "amill" theologians would include popular writers such as J. I. Packer, Mike Horton, [the late] Calvin seminary professor, Anthony Hoekema, and RC Sproul. In addition, all of the Reformers, as well as the Reformed and Lutheran confessional traditions, as a whole, have been amillennial.

Bibliography

The most important and useful amillennial work is the excellent book by Anthony A. Hoekema, The Bible and the Future (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982). Also helpful are: Oswald T. Allis, Prophecy and the Church (Phillipsburg: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1947); Arthur Lewis, The Dark Side of the Millennium (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980); William E. Cox, Amillennialism Today (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1966); William E. Cox, Biblical Studies in Final Things (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1966).