

Eschatology: The Book of Revelation (Introduction)

Review of Key NT Texts

1) Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21 (The Olivet Discourse)

Jesus tells us when these prophecies will be fulfilled. Jesus expected that within one generation, all of these prophecies would be fulfilled. This happened between AD 30 and AD 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed.

Mark 13:30

2) 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

This text is fairly straight forward. When Jesus' returns from heaven in a visible and public way, the resurrection will also take place. This is obviously still future.

1 Thessalonians 4:16

3) 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

This text describes the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord is when the Lord judges, which he did in AD 70 when he destroyed Jerusalem.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-2

4) 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Paul had to clear up some confusion from his first letter to the Thessalonians. Paul reassures them that the day of the Lord had not yet happened. He then goes on to speak about the "man of sin" (2:3), the "restrainer" (2:6), and the "man of lawlessness" (2:8). These are all fulfilled in the first century before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2

5) 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7

The antichrist is the source of much confusion. John makes the point that there is not "the" antichrist, but many antichrists. Satan is the ultimate antichrist, but anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ is also against Christ.

1 John 2:22

Common Mistakes in Interpreting Prophecy

- 1) We tend to apply the prophecies directly to us, as if we are the terminal generation. Every generation believes that they are the last generation. This is chronological arrogance.
- 2) We tend to ignore the time indicators within prophetic texts. Words like "this generation," "shortly," and "near" are not taken literally.
- 3) We tend to underestimate the importance of the ascension of Christ and the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. We fail to see that these two events are central to both OT and NT prophetic interpretation.

Why Study the Book of Revelation?

For most, the book of Revelation is a mystery which is best left unsolved. The less we know, the better off we are. Right? Wrong!

Revelation

The book of Revelation does contain some difficult texts that are hard to understand. However, we cannot say this categorically about the entire book. As a whole, the book is fairly easy to understand. It is not intended to be overly mysterious or enigmatic. In fact, the word "revelation" actually means "revealing" or "disclosure." Revelation is a revealing of Jesus Christ. The more we study Revelation, the more we will understand Jesus Christ. This is the goal of our study.

Blessing

Revelation promises blessing to those who study and obey the message of the book. Revelation begins and ends with Jesus promising a blessing to those who hear and obey his book. I often hear people say that Revelation is too confusing and that we should not even try to understand it. This goes precisely against what Jesus says. Blessing awaits!

Revelation 1:3; 22:7

Eschatology: The Book of Revelation (Introduction)

Sanctification

Studying Revelation is not simply an intellectual exercise. As one commentator wrote, "If there was one major concern among the Biblical prophets, it was ethical conduct. No Biblical writer ever revealed the future merely for the sake of satisfying curiosity: The goal was always to direct God's people toward right action in the present." The goal of prophecy is sanctification

First Things

The Purpose of Revelation

The book tells us upfront what to expect. Revelation is about Jesus Christ. He reveals himself to his people. John did not author the book of Revelation. He recorded it, but it was from a vision of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 1:1a

Time Texts in Revelation

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus gives us a timeframe of when to expect the fulfillment of those prophecies ("this generation"). Jesus also gives us a timeframe of when to expect the book of Revelation to be fulfilled.

Revelation 1:1, 3

Right upfront, Jesus gives us two time texts. He informs us that Revelation is about "things which must shortly take place" and that "the time is near." Jesus also concludes Revelation with another time text.

Revelation 22:6

Jesus repeats the phrase from 1:1, "the things which must shortly take place." Obviously, these time texts point us to a first century fulfillment, rather than a fulfillment at the end of history.

The First Century Context

In the first century, the major event is the first coming of Christ, which includes his incarnation, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, and his judgment of Jerusalem in AD 70. As we study the book of Revelation, we will find references to each of these aspects of the first coming of Jesus. However, the book of Revelation is mostly about Jesus' judgment of Jerusalem and the events leading up to this.

Why Sevens?

If you have read through the book of Revelation before, one of the major things that jumps out at you is the prominence of the number seven. There are seven letters to seven churches. There are seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven woes. In all, the number seven occurs fifty-four times in the book. Additionally, many lists contain seven items. Many phrases are made up of seven words. Why all the sevens? The number seven should always remind us of the seven days of creation. In Genesis 1-2, we are told that God created the world in seven days.

Creation

The preponderance of sevens in the book of Revelation show us that creation is a central focus. Indeed, the last two chapters are about creation.

Revelation 21:1-2, 5

God was going to create a new heaven and a new earth. God was bringing down the New Jerusalem. God was making all things new. Revelation is about creation, the new creation. The cycle of sevens reminds us of creation

De-Creation

However, before God makes all things new, he must destroy the original creation. He must destroy before he creates. The bulk of Revelation is about this destruction and the accompanying judgment. The cycle of sevens is the undoing of creation, a de-creation.

As we study the book, we will find out that God is not destroying and de-creating the entire universe or even the planet earth. He is destroying the original creation, that is, the original

Eschatology: The Book of Revelation (Introduction)

religious system. God is destroying the temple, the priesthood, the city of Jerusalem. He is destroying the old covenant and ushering in the new covenant.

Transition Period

The book of Revelation covers the transitional period of AD 30-70. The new creation began in AD 30. The new covenant was inaugurated at the Last Supper and in Jesus' death. The resurrection was the first fruits of the new creation. The ascension was the crowning of Jesus as king of the new creation. Pentecost brought the promise of the Spirit and the union of Jews and Gentiles. All of these events occurred in AD 30.

However, Jerusalem was not destroyed until AD 70. God gave the Jews one generation (forty years) to repent. Revelation is about this transition period from AD 30-70. It is about the destruction of the old creation and the bringing in of the new creation. The period of time covered in Revelation is basically the same period of time covered in Acts and the Epistles, though it focuses on the final events of that period. We ought to look for connections between what is going on in Acts and the epistles and between the book of Revelation.

Thus, Revelation was not written to the Jews but to the church. Specifically, it was written to seven churches from the first century. Revelation is not concerned with the war between Jews and Romans, which ultimately resulted in the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. Rather, Revelation is concerned about the church. It is about evangelism, faithfulness, martyrdom, and the vindication of the saints who stand firm.

In Acts, the Jews are seen as the enemy of the church. They are the ones persecuting the church. In Revelation, this continues as Jesus refers to the Jews by various titles: false apostles, Balaamites, Nicolaitans, the synagogue of Satan, Babylon the Great Whore, etc.

In the book of Acts, the Romans are the ones defending the church, restraining the Jews from carrying out persecution to the fullest. However, as Revelation predicts, in the near future, Rome will become a "Beast" and will persecute the church. The purpose of Revelation was to prepare the church for all of this persecution, both the existing Jewish persecution and coming Roman persecution.

The Significance of the Destruction of Jerusalem

The final destruction of the old creation was the public vindication of Jesus Christ. Repeatedly, Jesus warned that destruction was going to come on the apostate Jews. The temple was rendered obsolete at the splitting of the veil when Jesus was crucified. The existing temple became an offense to the true temple, Jesus Christ. The animal sacrifices immediately ceased to have any redemptive value. They became an abomination to the true sacrifice, Jesus Christ. The temple had to be destroyed. The animal sacrifices had to be stopped. The Jews had to be judged for rejecting their Messiah.

In his kindness, God did give the Jews forty years to repent before he destroyed the temple once and for all. Thousands of Jews repented and turned to Jesus during this forty year window. Thus, the destruction of Jerusalem was a judgment upon unbelieving Jews. The curses of the covenant had to be carried out. However, the destruction of Jerusalem was also the vindication of Jesus Christ, the proof that he was King.

Jesus' resurrection was a relatively private vindication of his innocence. He mainly appeared to his disciples and to just five hundred others. The destruction of Jerusalem was Jesus' public vindication that he was innocent. Thousands witnessed the temple and the city being destroyed. It was proof that Jesus had ascended to heaven to be the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The destruction of Jerusalem was the sign of the ascension, the sign of the Son of Man was coming on the clouds of heaven.