

Wednesday, March 9, 2022

EPIISODE 21: MAKE IT MAKE SENSE

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

CONTEXT

In this episode, we will discuss how the reader should approach any biblical text. As we continue to look at interpretation, we'll look at apocalyptic literature that will help you properly interpret these kinds of texts.

Interpretation asks the question: What does it mean? (William Hendricks)

IMPORTANCE OF GENRES IN INTERPRETATION

- i. Literary Form or Genre
 - a) The Bible involves writings from various genres. Genres have rules for their interpretation. Just as it is important to understand genre for music or movies, it's important to understand biblical genre.
 - b) Biblical genres (con't)
 - 1) Covered so far—narratives, law, wisdom, poetry, prophecy, gospels, and parables
 - 2) Covering this week: Apocalyptic literature

APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

- i. Definitions
 - a) What is eschatology? Eschatology is based on the belief that God will intervene in history to bring about an anticipated future. (John 6:44—translated “last day”) (see also Rev. 22:13)
 - b) Apocalyptic—dramatic, very symbolic, with vivid imagery
- ii. Very tough to interpret, even for the sharpest of minds. Calvin wrote a commentary on nearly every other book of the Bible—besides Revelation.
 - a) Apocalyptic literature is a “close cousin” of prophetic literature and often include prophetic messages. In fact, Revelation is a hybrid of three genres: epistle, prophecy, and apocalyptic literature.
 - b) Some differences: Prophecy vs. Apocalyptic
 - 1) Prophecy has direct speech from God: “Thus says the Lord...” while apocalyptic literature has mystery and symbols through indirect speech of an intermediary.
 - 2) Prophecy is prediction of imminent and future events while apocalyptic literature is prediction of cosmic, final events What does apocalypse mean?

- c) It DOES NOT mean the end of the world. The power of media has shaped our perception (Left Behind Series).
- d) Apocalypse is derived from the Greek ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalypsis*), or “revelation” (See John 1:1).
- e) Apocalyptic literature usually comes in the form of a dream, vision, or use of symbols.
- f) Components of an apocalyptic message:
 - 1) God promises to intervene in dire circumstances, giving assurance of victory
 - 2) In the meantime, things may get very bad
 - 3) Message is filled with supernatural and symbolic terms
 - 4) Encourages and warns God’s people in midst of trials.
- g) How to interpret apocalyptic literature: May God be with you (☺).
 - 1) *Don’t forget the pastoral concern.* Daniel is writing to encourage Israelites suffering under foreign rulers. John is writing to encourage Christians under severe persecution from Roman empire.
 - 2) *Understand what kind of messaging in there for original audience.* Text can’t mean something that was incomprehensible to original audience. (Example: “Helicopters” in Revelation 9:7-11 (takes the supernatural and imposes natural on it); Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970))
 - 3) *Don’t try to understand everything.* Try to grasp as much as you can. Even Daniel didn’t understand his visions (Daniel 8:27; 12:8)
 - 4) *Don’t get too lost in symbols.* Interpret symbols with illustrative meaning and not literal meaning. (Example: 4 beasts in Daniel 7 tells you something about the four kingdoms. They are going to ravage the world. The type of beasts don’t represent certain kingdoms. Too far.) Contrast w/ the Daniel 7:13-14 and the son of man.
 - 5) *Let Scripture interpret Scripture.* Revelation explains itself at points and quotes OT apocalyptic material more than any other book. (See Revelation 1:20; bowl of incense=prayers of the saints in Revelation 5:8)
 - 6) *Determine the main point.* What does the text say about empires and oppressors?

EXAMPLES

- h) The Two Witnesses of Revelation. Who are they?
 - 1) Revelation 11:3-8-OT usage of olive trees (Psalm 52:8; Jeremiah 11:16; Zechariah 4:3, 11)
- i) The Four Beasts of Daniel. What are they?
 - 1) Daniel 7:1-8- tells you something about the four kingdoms. Contrast with Daniel 7:13-14 and son of man
- j) Matthew 24:36-42-no one knows the day and hour. The main point-Stay woke! (verse 42)
- k) 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18-Think about the audience? What message is there? Verses 13 and 18 tell us. Verse 17, taken out of context, has led to some bad theology. Christ isn’t coming to take us out of this world, he’s returning to set up his kingdom here on earth.