

Eschatology and The Book of Revelation

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Eschatology and the Book of Revelation

The four understandings of the Book of Revelation

Introduction

Over the last 1900 years, four primary understandings of the Book of Revelation have developed - the Idealist, Preterist, Historicist and Futurist viewpoints. These understandings are distinct with their own notable characteristics. Horton believes that part of the reason for this incompatible variety stems from whether the hermeneutics employed tend to interpret the Bible more literally or figuratively (Horton, 1994, p. 619). As will be explained however, there are stronger reasons for the variety, which pertain to one's objectivity.

Idealist

The Idealist believes simply that Revelation does not refer to any historical or future event at all; rather it is a timeless allegory of the conflict between good and evil (Stern, 1992, p. 784) - a description of the spiritual principles of God that equip one for spiritual battles, which constantly confront the Church (Goswiller, n.d., p. 5).

This view originated with the Alexandrian School of Theology represented by Clement and Origen, who (consistent with their other teachings) taught that the "true spiritual interpretation" of the book could only be discovered through an allegorical interpretation (Goswiller, n.d., p. 5; Wilson, n.d., p. 15).

Nevertheless, though the book does have many symbolic figures, they all represent realities. The Antichrist is called a beast, but he will be a real person and will fulfill plain statements given in other prophecies (such as II Thessalonians 2:3-12). Jesus must personally come to bring about the final triumph (Horton, 1994, p. 619).

The Idealist view does not appear to have much serious support, its deficiencies being apparent. Morris (1980, p. 1338) states, "The difficulty is that the seer does claim to be prophesying of later days". Wilson (n.d., p. 6) writes, "The results of this method were not satisfactory, for each interpreter understood the symbols and figures according to his own ideas". Jensen (1981, p. 498) goes as far as to claim that this view is anemic.

Preterist

The Preterist view derives its name from the Latin word *praeter* meaning "past". It attempts to relate all of Revelation except for the very end to events in the first century, with Rome and its early emperors, particularly Nero, being the only principals (Horton, 1994, p. 619).

Kenneth Gentry (n.d.) sustains this position by appealing to 1:9 ("I John, who also am your brother, and companion in the tribulation") as evidence that "the" tribulation was a reality in John's time (although most translations do not render the verse this way). Gentry continues, citing the continual warnings, "He that has an ear, let him hear" (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) as evidence that the events of Revelation were taking place in that day.

Gentry further appeals to Revelation 17 where a vision of the seven-headed beast is recorded, verses 9 and 10 explaining,

Revelation 17:9-10 Here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh he must continue a short space.

Gentry (n.d.) proceeds to explain that the seven mountains represent the famous seven hills of Rome. The seven heads also have a political reference, being simultaneously seven kings. Gentry states,

Gentry It surely is no accident that Nero was the sixth emperor of Rome. Flavius Josephus, the Jewish contemporary of John, clearly points out that Julius Caesar was the first emperor of Rome and that he was followed in succession by Augustus, Tiberius, Caius, Claudius, and, sixthly, Nero (Antiquities, books 18 and 19).

Gentry next enlists the aid of the number of the Beast from Revelation 13:18 to prove "Nero and Nero alone fits the bill as the specific or personal expression of the Beast" (Gentry, n.d.), stating

Gentry A Hebrew spelling of Nero Caesar's name was Nrwn Qsr. ... It has been documented by archaeological finds that a first century Hebrew spelling of Nero's name provides us with precisely the value of 666.

Although Preterists believe that the last two chapters of Revelation pertain to the future (Jensen, 1981, p. 498), the essence of their position is that the events of Revelation arose

Morris out of conditions in the Roman empire of the 1st century AD. The seer was appalled at the possibilities for evil inherent in the Roman empire and he used symbolic imagery to protest against it, and to record his conviction that God would intervene to bring about what pleased him (Morris, 1980, p. 1338).

Nevertheless, despite Gentry's firm belief, one must conclude that the Preterist position is untenable. It overlooks the fact that the book calls itself a prophecy (1:3). Mickelsen finds fault with the Preterist understanding of the mark of the Beast, stating,

Mickelsen Nero Caesar in Hebrew letters comes out right if the consonants are NRWN QSR. But in the Talmud the word Caesar is spelled QYSR. If this is adopted, the total numerical value comes to 676. In Greek, of course, no form of Nero Caesar comes to 666 (Mickelsen, 1963, p. 202; also Morris, 1980, p. 1338).

Finally, the Preterist view is highly dependent on Revelation having been written before 70 A.D., yet the evidence for a 95/96 A.D. date is overwhelming (Goswiller, n.d., p. 3), Irenaeus even explicitly stating that John wrote the book during Domitian's reign (Glasson, 1965, p. 8; Morris, 1980, p. 1338).

Historicist

The Historicist view of Revelation attempts to map the events described in the book to historical events, providing a panorama of the history of the Church from the days of John to the end of time (Ryrie, 1978, p. 1785).

Thomas Foster (1983, p. 8), co-founder of the Christian Revival Crusade, sees the seven Churches in chapters two and three of Revelation as being an overview of the entire Church age (which many Futurists would also believe). Chapters four to 19 of Revelation are claimed to be a more in-depth view of Church history, with the Millennium being described in chapter 20. According to Foster (1983, p. 123), "the Millennium proper commences about 2000 A.D." although the Laodicean period finished in 1967 (Foster, 1983, p. 18) with the six-day war in Israel.

Foster's views are strongly anti-Catholic. The beast worship of Revelation 13 is related to allegiance to the Papal Empire in 533 B.C (Foster, 1983, p. 68). The mark of the beast is the Latin language (*kateimus* having the value 666) which is significant because Pope Vitallian issued a decree commanding the exclusive use of Latin in all services of the Catholic Church in 666 A.D. (Foster, 1983, p. 74-75). Further, the battle of Armageddon is claimed to be nothing more than Russian Communism challenging Britain and the USA for supremacy (Foster, 1983, p. 94), Britain and the USA having replaced Israel, and Communism being related to Roman Catholicism.

This view is fraught with complications - its interpretations are subjective and internally inconsistent. Foster, for example, believes that the 42 months of blasphemies by the beast refers to 1260 years of Papal power from 606 A.D. to 1866 A.D. (Foster, 1983, p. 68). Nevertheless, the closest Foster can come to a historical event for this is the capturing of Rome by Italy in 1870 (Foster, 1983, p. 89). One must also question the hermeneutic involved in "a day stands for a year" (Foster, 1983, p. 55) used to achieve certain dates in this scheme.

Further, Morris (1980, p. 1338) states, "It is difficult to see why the outline of history should confine itself to W[estern] Europe, especially since in earlier days at least much of the expansion of Christianity was in E[astern] lands." Finally, Historicist adherers tend to continually rework the whole interpretation to come out in their own generation (Horton, 1994, p. 619; Morris, 1980, p. 1338). This has been the case with Historicists in the past and undoubtedly certain of Foster's dates would now be different.

Futurist

Although the three views given above may entail some recognition of predictive prophecy in Revelation, not one of them permit Eschatological derivations to be made. The fourth manner in which Revelation may be understood is the Futurist viewpoint, which views most of the book (chapters 4 - 22) as prophecy yet to be fulfilled. Ryrie (1978, p. 1785) believes this to be the only logical interpretation if one is to interpret the text plainly. Similarly, Walvoord states that the Futurist (in particular, pre-millennial, pre-tribulationism) viewpoint is the only one which most literally follows scripture under "consistent and proper hermeneutics" (Walvoord, 1978, p. 270).

Nevertheless, the Futurist viewpoint itself contains a number of variant views. The seven Churches in chapters two and three, for example, may be seen in a Preterist manner (that is, relating solely to the Church in the first century) or a Historicist manner (that is, reflecting the history of the Church). Yonggi Cho, for example, holds to the latter view, with the Laodicean Church reflecting the Church from 1905 until the Tribulation (Cho, 1991, p. 47). The most reasonable view, however, is the Characteristic Interpretation where the letters, while still written to physical Churches in John's day, present a picture of the continuous conditions of the Church throughout

history - that is, at any given time there will be an "Ephesian" Church, a "Laodicean" Church and so on (Goswiller, n.d., p. 13).

Another area for consideration is the millennium, which has its basis in Revelation 20 - "He threw him [Satan] into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations any more until the thousand years were ended" (20:3); "They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (20:4, also 20:5, 7). "Millennium" means a thousand years, and Christian thought is divided into three categories over the millennium. Amillennialists believe that the millennium is not a literal period of time, rather

Goswiller the millennial kingdom is not future but is spiritual and is in progress at the present time. There is no distinction between the Church and Israel and Satan is actually bound now through the victory of Jesus at the cross and Christ reigns in the world in the hearts of his followers (Goswiller, n.d., p. 2).

Post-millennialists believe that the millennium is a literal thousand year period, but in contrast to Revelation's chronological ordering, "Christ will have a spiritual reign which will last for 1,000 years. His second coming follows the thousand year reign" (Goswiller, n.d., p. 2). A flaw in post-millennial thinking is that Christ's spiritual reign is to come about because "the present gospel message will root out all the evils of the world" (Goswiller, n.d., p. 2). This notion was first perpetuated by Augustine who claimed that the ever-increasing influence of the Church would overturn evil in the world before Christ's return (Zoba, 1995, p. 20). The Bible however indicates that the world's condition will worsen in the last days (I Timothy 4:1-3; II Timothy 3:1-5).

During the Middle Ages the thought of a literal millennium was generally regarded as heretical (Berkhof, 1975, p. 263), but the faith of the early Church was undoubtedly *chiliasm* - an ill-defined pre-millennial outlook (Berkhof, 1975, p. 262; Zoba, 1995, p. 21) which anticipated Christ's literal thousand year reign after His Second Coming.

Again, the Futurist viewpoint is divided over chapters four to 19. While all recognise the seven year Great Tribulation, the timing of the rapture is in dispute, the rapture being the "catching up" described in I Thessalonians 4:13-18 and I Corinthians 15:51-52. Post-tribulationists believe that the rapture occurs after the Tribulation. This means that the Church must endure the Tribulation, and Willmington (n.d., p. 825) dismisses this view by appealing to I Thessalonians 5:9 ("For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ"). Mid-tribulationists believe that the rapture occurs midway through the Tribulation, and finally pre-tribulationists believe that the rapture occurs prior to the Tribulation. It is important to note that "only in relation to the premillennial position does the issue of when the rapture takes place arise; for Post- and Amillennialists, the rapture is vaguely identified with the Messiah's one and only return" (Stern, 1992, p. 623).

To realise the time of the rapture one must recognise that the Tribulation is not merely a time of suffering or persecution (indeed, Christ said, "in this world you will have tribulation" in John 16:33). It is rather a time of God's wrath being outpoured on the earth. People will cry to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Revelation 6:16-17). Just as God delivered Noah and his family from God's wrath (Genesis 7:6-7) and Lot and his daughters (Genesis 19:14) and even the Israelites (Exodus 7:18; 8:3, 21-22; 9:3-4; 10:22-23; 11:6-7), so too the Church shall be saved from the coming Tribulation by the rapture - for the Church looks for "His Son from heaven who has delivered us from the wrath to come" (I Thessalonians 1:10).

Conclusion

Four (main) views of the Book of Revelation exist; obviously not all can be simultaneously correct. While pondering the area of modern-day miracles, former Dallas Theological Seminary professor, Jack Deere, made the conclusion,

Deere ... the majority of what Christians believe is not derived from their own patient and careful study of the Scriptures. The majority of Christians believe what they believe because godly and respected teachers told them it was correct. (Deere, 1993, p. 47).

This is not necessarily negative, however. Many Christians believe in the deity of Jesus, for example, and believe the Scriptures teach this, but they could never defend His deity from the Scriptures, nor did they personally come to this belief through their own study of the Scriptures. It is part of the tradition that has been handed down to them by teachers. In this case, they benefit from tradition because this particular tradition is fully supported by Scripture. Nevertheless, for this reason, many notions have been propagated which are not Scripturally sound.

Revelation should not be an overwhelming mystery. John wrote to reveal, not to conceal truth, "revelation" meaning an "opening up, uncovering" (Gentry, n.d.). The facts have been presented and conclusions may be drawn. Everyone is encouraged to read Revelation; a blessing is promised to those who persevere in its study -

Revelation 1:3 Blessed is he who reads, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand (Revelation 1:3).

The Christology of Revelation

Introduction

The Book of Revelation is the perennial culmination of the New Testament canon. It is a work of profound theology, but overall, it is the Revelation of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:1) and any commentary cannot neglect this fact; it pervades all understanding of the book. Christ is present in visual representations, in titles used of Him, and functions ascribed to Him (Guthrie, 1987, p. 39).

The risen Christ

The portrayal of Jesus in the Book of Revelation is dramatically different to that of the gospels. No longer is the second person of the Trinity restricted, having surrendered temporarily the volitional use of His divine attributes (Philippians 2:5-8). Rather than being one who thirsted (John 19:28), hungered (Matthew 4:2) and sweat drops like blood (Luke 22:44), the Christ of Revelation is unparalleled (Guthrie, 1987, p. 41) and stands in the midst of the seven Churches

Revelation 1:13-16 dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance (Revelation 1:13-16).

Jesus' mission on earth has been accomplished. Just before finally dying on the cross He declared, "It is finished" (Revelation 19:30). At this time He canceled the code that was against us (Colossians 2:14) and disarmed the powers and authorities, making a public spectacle of them (Colossians 2:15). Having done this, in Revelation, He is revealed as having wrested the keys of death and Hades (Revelation 1:18). As Jesus explains to John, He is the First and the Last. He is the Living One. He was dead, but behold, He is alive for ever and ever (Revelation 1:17-18). As Wilson (n.d., p. 74) comments, "Christ's was not the resuscitation of the body - it was complete victory over death."

Jesus humbled Himself and took upon Himself the nature of a servant (Philippians 2:7). He clothed Himself in the likeness of sinful flesh (Romans 8:3), being found in appearance as a man (Philippians 2:8). But now, just as Christ prayed that the Father would glorify Him with the glory He had with the Father before the world began (John 17:5), God has exalted Him to the highest place and given Him the name that is above every name (Philippians 2:9).

Not only is Jesus the First and the Last, He is the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:5). He is the Bright Morning Star (Revelation 22:16). He is the Alpha and the Omega, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty (Revelation 1:8), the Beginning and the End (Revelation 22:13). Since alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, it is not difficult to imagine that these last titles are equivalent in meaning with "the First and the Last". Of particular interest is the fact these are also the sole designations of God which appear in Revelation (1:8; 21:6). Christ's possesses the

fullness of deity (Colossians 2:9), but these designations express more than this mere fact. Bauckham (1993, p. 27) explains,

Bauckham In the form, 'the first and the last', the designation derives from Isaiah, where it occurs, as in Revelation, as a divine self-designation: 'I am the first and the last; besides me there is no god' (44:6); 'I am he; I am the first, and I am the last' (48:12; cf. also 41:4). . . . the designation encapsulates the understanding of the God of Israel as the sole Creator of all things and sovereign Lord of history, which. . . . [Isaiah] so magnificently expounds and asserts polemically against the idols of Babylon. Unlike human-made gods, this God is the utterly incomparable One, to whom all nations are subject, whose purpose none can frustrate (cf. Isa. 40:12-26). It is precisely this exclusive monotheistic faith that determines the prophetic outlook of Revelation. Hence the unique importance of the designation: 'the Alpha and the Omega'. God precedes all things, as their Creator, and he will bring all things to eschatological fulfillment. He is the origin and goal of all history.

This is the risen Christ in the Book of Revelation; this is the risen Christ for the rest of time.

Christ directs the Churches

Jesus directed John to write to the angels of each of seven prominent Churches in the Asia Minor of the time (Revelation 2-3). Possibly the "angels" refer to supernatural beings, potentially protecting the Churches, but it is more likely that **aggeloi** here means human messengers (such as the leaders of the Churches), just as it does in James 2:25 and Luke 9:52. Nevertheless, both the angels and the Churches belong to Christ; He holds the angels in His hand (Revelation 1:16, 20; 2:1) and He walks amongst the Churches (Revelation 1:13; 2:1). According to Rienecker and Rogers (1976, p. 815) **peripateo** (walks among) implies that the Lord patrols the ground and is ever on the spot when He is needed; His presence is not localised but is coextensive within the Church. Goswiler (n.d., p. 14) draws a comparison with the location of the tabernacle in the midst of the camp in the Old Testament.

Jesus loves His Church; indeed, it was for its members that He died (John 3:16; Romans 5:8-9). For each of the seven Churches, apart from Laodicea, Jesus had a word of encouragement. He is attentive - He knows their deeds (Revelation 2:2; 2:19; 3:1; 3:7; 3:15), their afflictions and their poverty (Revelation 2:9), where they live (Revelation 2:12), and their love, faith, service and perseverance (Revelation 2:19). For these things, Christ commends the Churches.

Yet, He who commends also searches hearts and minds, and will repay each according to their deeds (Revelation 2:23). For each Church, apart from Smyrna and Philadelphia, comes a rebuke. Yet, Christ quickly follows each of these with an exhortation and then a promise. The smallest and most insignificant Church is assured of Christ's presence (Wilson, n.d., p. 77).

Elsewhere in Revelation, an angel declares, "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10). Just as is evident from the letters to the Churches, the Spirit speaks in the accents of the crucified and risen Lord, summoning people to become conquerors in the name of Him who has conquered (Caird, 1966, p. 238).

Nothing stands outside of the bounds of Christ's knowledge. He makes careful, precise diagnoses of attainments and failures of each congregation. Many may be deceived by the outward wealth and success of the Laodicean Church, but Christ knew all the truth: wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked (Revelation 3:17). Such

infallible discernment is devastating to the insincere and challenging to the sincere (Wilson, n.d., p. 78).

Christ the Lamb

John wept because he believed there were none found worthy to open or look inside the scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals (Revelation 5:1-4). Straightaway he was told not to weep, the reason being, "The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals" (Revelation 5:5). At this, Christ appears, as a Lamb which had been slain (Revelation 5:6) and who was worthy of great praise and worship (Revelation 5:9-14).

This worship is particularly significant Christologically, given that twice John prostrates himself before the angel who mediates the revelation to him. The angel protests that he is no more than a fellow servant of God, and directs John to worship God (Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9). The angel who shows the visions to John is not the source of revelation, but only the instrument for its communication. Jesus is the source of revelation (Revelation 22:16). The implication exists that He, unlike the angel, is not excluded from monotheistic worship but is rather included in it, confirmed by the explicit worship of Jesus elsewhere in Revelation (Bauckham, 1993, p. 59).

In chapter five, Christ is the Lamb. He has triumphed through His death and resurrection and is seen standing on the divine throne (the probable meaning of 5:6; cf. 7:17; Bauckham, 1993, p. 60). In turn He becomes the center of the circle of worship, moving outward from the living creatures and the elders (5:8) to the myriads of angels (5:12, paralleling that offered to God in 4:11), and finally to the whole of creation in a doxology addressed to God and the Lamb together (5:13). The worship of the Lamb (5:8-12) leads to the worship of God and the Lamb together (5:13). Bauckham (1993, p. 60) states,

Bauckham John does not wish to represent Jesus as an alternative object of worship alongside God, but as one who shares in the glory due to God. He is worthy of divine worship because his worship can be included in the worship of the one God.

Nevertheless, Christ is related to the world not only as the transcendent holy One, but also as the slaughtered Lamb. Revelation 5:9-10 clearly identifies Jesus with the Old Testament Passover lamb (Cho, 1991, p. 67-68; Guthrie, 1987, p. 47), where the worship song given to Him states that He has ransomed a people and made them a kingdom and priests serving their God, echoing the Sinai covenant (Exodus 19:5-6) whereby God made the people He brought out of Egypt His own people. This liberation was often referred to as His ransoming His people from slavery (Deuteronomy 7:8; 13:5).

Furthermore, Revelation 5 portrays the conviction that in his death and resurrection Christ has already won His decisive victory over evil (Glasson, 1965, p. 45) - which Bauckham (1993, p. 73) sees as being fundamental to Revelation's whole understanding of the way in which Christ establishes God's kingdom on earth. The key to this, Bauckham explains, and to Christ's qualifications as the only one able to open the scroll, is the contrast between what John hears (Revelation 5:5) and what he sees (Revelation 5:6). Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the root of David who has conquered. These two messianic titles evoke a strongly militaristic and nationalistic image of the Messiah as a conqueror of the nations, destroying God's enemies (Bauckham, 1993, p. 74). Nevertheless, this image is reinterpreted by that which John

actually sees: the Lamb whose sacrificial death (5:6) has redeemed people from all nations (5:9-10). Bauckham (1993, p. 74) continues,

Bauckham John has forged a new symbol of conquest by sacrificial death. The messianic hopes evoked in 5:5 are not repudiated: Jesus really is the expected Messiah of David (22:16). But insofar as the latter was associated with military violence and narrow nationalism, it is reinterpreted by the image of the Lamb. The Messiah has certainly won a victory, but he has done so by sacrifice and for the benefit of people from all nations (5:9). Thus the means by which the Davidic Messiah has won his victory is explained by the image of the Lamb, while the significance of the image of the Lamb is now seen to lie in the fact that his sacrificial death was a victory over evil.

The wrath of Christ

John sees in heaven the absolute holiness, righteousness and sovereignty of God (Revelation 4). From "this vision of God's name hallowed and God's will done on heaven, it follows that his kingdom must come on earth" (Bauckham, 1993, p. 40). It is this which makes chapter 4, and its Christological continuation in chapter 5, foundational for all that which follows (c.f. Glasson, 1965, p. 45), namely the catastrophic multitude of plagues and judgments which strike the earth until Christ's return.

In all of these things, terrible as they are, Christ is revealed as a divine judge (Revelation 19:11). It is His wrath which is being outpoured. During the time of the Tribulation people shall cry to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Revelation 6:16-17). Surely the day of the Lord will be terrible (Malachi 4:5) as Christ treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty (Revelation 19:15).

Nevertheless, it is important to realise that the Lamb can be as little held responsible for the activities of, for example, the four horseman, as for those of Judas, Caiaphas and Pilate. Caird (1966, p. 91) explains that the

Caird wrath of God in the Revelation, as elsewhere in the Old and New Testaments, represents not the personal attitude of God towards sinners, but an impersonal process of retribution working itself out in the course of history; that the Lamb is at all times a symbol to be understood with reference to the Cross, so that the Cross itself is both the victory of God and the judgment of the world; and that therefore **the wrath of the Lamb** must be interpreted as 'the working out in history of the consequences of the rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah'.

The return and reign of Christ

The Tribulation period draws to a remarkable close with the return of Christ to the earth. Just as in chapter one His image bears little resemblance to that of the carpenter's son. His eyes are like blazing fire and on His head are many crowns (Revelation 19:12) - for He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16). Against Him no one may stand; with swift and decisive action His enemies are subdued, and His Kingdom established, judgment finally enacted (Revelation 19:17-20:15).

At last, all things are made new (Revelation 21:5). The end of this age has passed and the act of creation has been reenacted. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old has passed away (Revelation 21:4). Yet, in all this, Christ is still the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End (Revelation 21:6). From the beginning of the book to the finish, He is unchanging. From the beginning of time to the end of time, He is. Jesus Christ is the same today, yesterday and forever (Hebrews 13:8) and has full rights to the sacred designation expressing His complete eternity and independence, "I AM" (John 8:58).

Conclusion

Just as Origen focused his attention on the Christology of the Book of Revelation (Daley, 1991, p. 49), so too must any honest interpreter. It is the Revelation of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:1) and it is Christ that the book reveals. He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, as well as the coming King (Nichols, 1994, p. 291).

The genre of the Book of Revelation

Introduction

To state that the Book of Revelation is an *apocalypse* is to be, strictly, tautologous, for "Revelation" is from the Greek word "apocalypsis" which means "an unveiling or unfolding of things not previously known and which could not be known apart from the unveiling" (Goswiller, n.d., p. 3).

However, "apocalypse" also refers to a particular genre of Judaistic writing with similar literary and eschatological characteristics. These were mainly written between the time of the oppression of the Jews under Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 B.C. to the revolt of Bar Kokhba in 135 A.D. (Wilson, n.d., p. 11).

The apocalyptic genre includes such books as the Assumption of Moses, 1 Enoch (or The Book of Enoch), 4 Ezra (or 2 Esdras in the Apocrypha), the Sibylline Oracles, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Psalter of Solomon, the Book of Jubilees (or The Little Genesis) and The Apocalypse of Baruch (Beasley-Murray, 1978, p. 15; Edersheim, 1993, p. 26; Stern, 1992, p. 785).

J.G. Collins defines an apocalypse as

Collins a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality, which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world (Bauckham, 1993, p. 6).

Such otherworldly mediation may be seen in apocalyptic passages such as 4 Ezra 3-10 and 2 Baruch 10-30. It is also evidenced in Revelation when one of the elders explains the great multitude in white robes (Revelation 7:13-17) and when one of the seven angels explains the meaning of the waters where the prostitute sits (Revelation 17:15-18), among other passages.

Collins' definition must be qualified, however. Bauckham (1993, p. 6) notes that apocalypses cover a wide range of topics - generally history and eschatology, but this is not necessarily true of all of them. Wilson (n.d., p. 5) also makes the important comment that "the ancient purpose of apocalyptic writing was to stimulate the people at times of national distress by the assurance that God's Deliverer would be raised up" - the apocalyptic motif is that of judgment followed by triumph and glory (Mickelsen, 1963, p. 303).

Apocalypses were usually written at a time of crisis and danger; their main purpose being to strengthen the believer (Glasson, 1965, p. 2). Accordingly, as Fiorenza states, "Revelation reflects a politico-religious conflict with the Roman empire and a persecution of the church in Asia Minor under Domitian."

The rise of Jewish apocalyptic literature

The central core of apocalyptic belief is a transcendent eschatology whereby the future is envisaged in terms of direct divine intervention - a universal judgment of the nations and a new age of salvation, in which the cosmos will be radically transformed

(Bauckham, 1980, p. 73). The method of apocalypse is to boldly outline by symbolic pictures those things which should be recognised as dangers, and the ways in which divine intervention was to be expected (Wilson, n.d., p. 5), expressing the idea that this world offers no hope for improvement, but history will end with a cosmic catastrophe at which time the apparently victorious wicked will be punished and the downtrodden righteous rewarded (Stern, 1992, p. 785).

It was after the perceived cessation of prophecy, that is, after Malachi, that the apocalyptic genre flourished. Because of the cessation of prophecy it was thought necessary to explain the sufferings of God's people and the delay of God's kingdom (Wilson, n.d., p. 11), in the context of the post-exilic experience of history, in which Israel remained under the domination of the Gentile powers and the prophetic promises of glorious restoration remained largely unfulfilled. Bauckham (1980, p. 74) elaborates,

Bauckham In the extended period of contradiction between God's promises and the reality of Israel's historical experience, the apocalyptists sought to assure the faithful that God had not abandoned his people, that the promised salvation was coming. To this end they stressed the divine *sovereignty over history*. God has predetermined the whole course of world history and the End will come at the time he has appointed.

The first apocalypse is considered to be the Book of Daniel (Caird, 1966, p. 9), the style of which was imitated in a succession of works (Beasley-Murray, 1978, p. 14; Edersheim, 1993, p. 26). Not all of these were particularly successful - Caird (1966, p. 10) labels 1 Enoch as one of the world's six worst books, and blames 4 Ezra (2 Esdras in the Apocrypha) for many of the most deplorable features of mediaeval theology.

The first great flowering of apocalyptic literature was in the mid-2nd-century B.C. crisis of Jewish faith under Antiochus Epiphanes when the apocalyptic was the literary vehicle of the Hasidic movement, which stood for national repentance, uncompromising opposition to hellenisation and eschatological faith in God's imminent intervention on behalf of His people (Bauckham, 1980, p. 73). In some sense, the apocalyptic may be called the "heir of prophecy" (Bauckham, 1980, p. 74; Beasley-Murray, 1978, p. 14). The apocalyptic writings are described as intended for "the wise among the people", embodying the ardent aspirations and the inmost hopes of those who longed for the "consolation of Israel", as they understood it (Edersheim, 1993, p. 26).

The apocalyptic genre flourished especially in times of national crisis, and are considered by George Eldon Ladd to be "Tracts for bad times" (Wilson, n.d., p. 11). The last great Jewish eschatological apocalypses come from the period between the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and the failure of Bar Kokhba's revolt (Bauckham, 1980, p. 73). Their exclusion from the Canon is not a negative judgment on their value for intertestamental development of Jewish religion. On the contrary, "by sustaining and intensifying the eschatological hope they played a decisively important role as a bridge between the Testaments" (Bauckham, 1980, p. 74).

Finally, it must be noted that although apocalypses presented a strongly deterministic view of history, this did not become a fatalism which contradicts human freedom and responsibility. The apocalyptists also called their readers to repentance, intercession and ethical action (Bauckham, 1980, p. 74).

Common features of apocalyptic literature

It is characteristic of apocalyptic writings that they portray the present crisis, whether it be the persecution of Antiochus or the fall of Jerusalem, against a background of world history, the present struggle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, and victory over the immediate enemy as the embodiment of the final victory of God (Caird, 1966, p. 9).

In particular, the apocalyptic works bore false names of authorship - such as those attributed to Moses, Abraham, Ezra, Enoch and Baruch (Edersheim, 1993, p. 26) - although this was not intended as a fraudulent device to deceive. Rather, the writer sought to identify with central figures of Judaism (Daley, 1991, p. 5), even acting as interpreters of Old Testament prophecy, assuming the authority of the figure. This then necessitated writing from a viewpoint in the past and fictionally "predicting" the history which had already taken place (Stern, 1992, p. 785). The apocalyptic work then sought to communicate a disclosure of a transcendent perspective on this world - usually this was achieved by a seer being taken in vision to God's throne room in heaven to learn the secrets of the divine purpose. This is the case in 1 Enoch 14-16; 46; 60:1-6; 71; 2 Enoch 20; and The Apocalypse of Abraham 9-18, as well as the Book of Revelation 4, when John is told to "Come up here" through the open door in heaven.

Such visionary transportation to heaven, visions of God's throne room, angelic mediators of revelation, symbolic visions of political powers, and coming judgment and new creation all served to reveal the world in the perspective of the transcendent divine purpose, and all these features may be seen in the Book of Revelation.

As a potential extension to the apocalyptists' pseudonymity was the fact that the apocalyptists would often make use of existing materials, continually feeding on Old Testament sources, both prophetic and apocalyptic (Bauckham, 1980, p. 74; Beasley-Murray, 1978, p. 18) which serve as vehicles for the writers message. Similarly, the Book of Revelation is remarkably full of Old Testament imagery and allusions to Old Testament sources. The seven and three and a half year periods relate to Daniel, as do the various images of world empires. The glory of God and the Temple relate to Ezekiel. Even the candlesticks from Revelation chapter 1 pertain to the Jewish menorah.

Some apocalypses were known as *cosmological apocalyptic*, which sought to reveal the mysteries of the cosmos. In 1 Enoch 6-36, Enoch is taken by angels on journeys through the heavens and the realms of the dead (Bauckham, 1980, p. 74), and he relates what he saw and heard. It is from this book that Jude quotes when he states, "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 14-15).

Overall, however, a particular question which the apocalyptists sought to answer was "Who is Lord over the world?" As has been stated, Jewish apocalypses were usually concerned with the apparent non-fulfillment of God's promises in the context of the righteous suffering while the wicked flourish - the world appears to be ruled not by God, but by evil. With this situation before them, the apocalyptists sought to maintain the faith of God's people in face of the harsh realities of present evil, especially political oppression by pagan empires (Bauckham, 1993, p. 8). Nevertheless, God rules creation and the time is coming when He will overthrow evil and establish His kingdom.

This may be seen in the apocalypse of Baruch where descriptions of the last days are given, and of the reign and judgment of the Messiah (Edersheim, 1993, p. 928). In the Book of Revelation, John writes to a people under Roman domination, even exiled from their own country. Yet, one cannot fail to discern the spiritual realities behind the seemingly natural calamities. There is war in the heavenlies (Revelation 12:7). The dragon of old, Satan, is the force behind the wickedness embodied in the form of the Beast (Revelation 13:4) who blasphemes God and makes war against the saints (Revelation 13:6-7). Yet, at the time appointed by God, John sees heaven standing open and there appears a white horse - the rider being the Faithful and True - none other than Jesus Christ, and with justice he judges and makes war (Revelation 19:11). The armies of heaven are behind Him and He strikes down the nations (Revelation 19:14-15). Judgment is enacted and Christ's reign is established (Revelation 20).

It is a characteristic of the apocalyptists to portray the coming eschatological salvation as a new creation, in which all forms of evil and suffering will be eliminated. Even death will be conquered. The eschatological age will be the kingdom of God, replacing all earthly empires for ever. The oppressors of Israel will be condemned (Bauckham, 1980, p. 74) and Israel will be restored in a transformed material world (Daley, 1991, p. 5). Again, this may be seen in the Book of Revelation where God declares all things are made new - the dwelling of God will be with men, and He will live with them. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, indeed, there is even a new heavens and a new earth (Revelation 21:3-5) and death and Hades are made to divulge their contents before being themselves cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

Unique features of the Book of Revelation

The Book of Revelation is no "mere" apocalypse, for it is the apocalypse of Jesus Christ - the faithful witness (Revelation 1:5). John was conscious of being a prophet of the Lord (Beasley-Murray, 1978, p. 14) and rather than write pseudonymously in the name of a long dead hero, he used his own name (Revelation 1:4).

He did not simply rewrite history as pseudo-prophecy either (Beasley-Murray, 1978, p. 18; Wilson, n.d., p. 12), rather he stood in his own time and looked forward to God's future consummation of his redemptive purpose. He did not despair of history but saw it as the scene of redemption and the Lamb of God as the only one who could solve the problems. Whereas Jewish apocalypses were entirely pessimistic about the past and present, John looked to the past work of Christ as the ground for present hope (Stern, 1992, p. 785).

Bauckham (1980, p. 75) sees that the essential difference is that the purely future orientation of Jewish apocalyptic is modified in the Book of Revelation by the conviction that eschatological *fulfillment has already begun* in the historical event of Jesus Christ. Christians live between the "already" and the "not yet". In this way the apocalyptic tendency to a negative evaluation of present history is superseded by the conviction that God's redemptive purpose is already at work within the history of this age.

Conclusion

The first readers of the Book of Revelation undoubtedly found that

Bauckham The bounds which Roman power and ideology set to the readers world are broken open, and that world is seen as open to the greater purpose of its transcendent creator and Lord (Bauckham, 1993, p. 7).

In this same way, the readers of an apocalypse were taken to see a new world - yet, it was their world, but not from their perspective. The apocalyptic genre countered false views of reality by attempting to open the world to divine transcendence.

The relationship of the Book of Revelation to eschatology

Introduction

Although historically the Book of Revelation has been assigned many different, even contradictory, meanings, it must be conceded that the book is essential for an understanding of eschatology.

"Eschatology" derives its name from the Greek word *eschatos*, meaning "last" and is the doctrine of the last things. Numerous writers (such as Dalton, 1968 and Wilder, 1950) have identified that Eschatology should include the notions of judgment and salvation, certain at the end of one's life. However, as Bauckham (1980, p. 470) states,

Bauckham In contrast to cyclical conceptions of history, the biblical writings understand history as a linear movement towards a goal. God is driving history towards the ultimate fulfillment of his purposes for his creation. So biblical eschatology is not limited to the destiny of the individual; it concerns the consummation of the whole history of the world, towards which all God's redemptive acts in history are directed.

This is the view of Horton (1994, p. 599) who adds, that in contrast to cynical pessimism, "Believers have a better hope in and through Christ, who himself is our hope (Col. 1:27; 1 Tim. 1:1)." This better hope, and the events involved in the consummation of the history of this present world, are described in the Book of Revelation, and without it, little could be known about this area.

Understandings of Revelation

The variety of understandings of eschatology evidenced in Christian thought comes partly from the interpretation of the Book of Revelation as a whole, part from the interpretation of Revelation 20, and part from whether the hermeneutics employed tend to interpret the Bible more literally or more figuratively (Horton, 1994, p. 619).

Four principal viewpoints have arisen concerning the interpretation of the Book of Revelation. The Preterist (from the Latin word *praeter* meaning "past") view attempts to relate all of Revelation except for the very end to events in the first century, with Rome and its early emperors the only principals (Horton, 1994, p. 619). However, the identifications made are very subjective and precarious and the events of Revelation are definitely tied to the end times and the return of Christ in glory. This viewpoint cannot stand if the later dating of Revelation (95/96 A.D.) is correct.

The Historicist view of Revelation attempts to map the events described in Revelation to historical events, providing a panorama of the history of the Church from the days of John to the end of time (Ryrie, 1978, p. 1785). This is the view of Foster (1983), but again this view is fraught with complications - its interpretations are subjective and internally inconsistent, and its adherers tend to continually rework the whole interpretation to come out in their own generation (Horton, 1994, p. 619).

The Idealist believes merely that Revelation does not refer to history at all, but is rather a timeless allegory of the conflict between good and evil (Stern, 1992, p. 784). Nevertheless, though the book does have many symbolic figures, they all represent realities. The Antichrist is called a beast, but he will be a real person and will fulfill plain

statements given in other prophecies (such as II Thessalonians 2:3-12). Jesus must personally come to bring about the final triumph (Horton, 1994, p. 619).

Although these three views may entail some recognition of predictive prophecy in Revelation, none of them permit Eschatological derivations to be made from it. The fourth manner in which Revelation may be understood is the Futurist viewpoint, which views most of the book (chapters 4 - 22) as prophecy yet to be fulfilled. Ryrie (1978, p. 1785) believes this to be the only logical interpretation, if one is to interpret the text plainly. Indeed, as Gentry (n.d.) states,

Gentry	The first sentence of John's prophecy has become the title of the entire work. And from that title we are clearly told that this work was to be a "revelation." The Greek word for "revelation" is apokalupsis, which means an "opening up, uncovering." John intended his book to be an opening up of divine truth for his original audience. He wrote to reveal, not to conceal truth.
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The chronology of End-Time events

Given the Futurist viewpoint, the book of Revelation has much to teach about Eschatology. From various Biblical passages, one becomes aware of the Rapture (I Thessalonians 4:15-17; I Corinthians 15:51-53) and the coming Great Tribulation (Isaiah 2:12; 13:6, 9; 34:8; Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 9:24-27; Joel 1:15; Zechariah 14:1; Matthew 24:21, 29). Indeed, one will realise that the Tribulation will last for seven years (Daniel 9:27) and that the Rapture must occur beforehand (I Thessalonians 5:9). It will also be known that Jesus will return (Matthew 24:30; Acts 1:11) and that the earth's situation will worsen (Matthew 24). Much more than this cannot really be known.

In magnificent detail, the Revelation to John reveals the essential chronology of the events of this seven year tribulation period and those to follow. The exact details are not given, and much speculation has been offered in this area, but this is relatively unwise. Nevertheless, one is quite able to know the general sequence of events and what must come to pass.

Revelation 4:1 begins with the Rapture and John being caught up into the throne room of Heaven. With this, the Tribulation period begins, the first of the seven seals being opened (6:1). This releases the Antichrist, who sets out to conquer (6:2).

The second, third and fourth seals are next removed, releasing war (6:4), famine (6:6) and death and hell (6:8) respectively, killing one quarter of the earth's population (6:8).

The fifth seal is opened and John sees many martyrs. Dake (1963, p. 290) comments:

Dake	These people will be saved after the resurrection of the dead in Christ - those from Abel to the rapture in Rev. 4:1. They will be martyred between the rapture and the 5th seal in the first 3 1/2 years of Daniel's 70th week, a period which takes in all the events of the seals and first 6 trumpets. They will be martyred by the great whore of Rev. 17:1-7 while she rules the 10 kings of the old Roman Empire territory and while the Antichrist is coming to power over them (Rev. 17:8-18).
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The sixth seal is opened and a massive earthquake occurs, sinking islands and flattening cities (6:12, 14); the sun becomes black, the moon as blood, and heavenly bodies fall to the earth (6:12-13). Indeed, the people shall cry to the mountains to fall

on them, for "the great day of his wrath is come: and who shall be able to stand?" (6:17). Upon the opening of the seventh seal, a silence of half an hour takes place in heaven (8:1).

Immediately the seven angels before God blow seven trumpets (8:2-11:15). Upon the blowing of these trumpets comes hail and fire upon the earth, destroying the green grass and a third of the trees (8:7); a heavenly body falls to the earth, turning a third of the sea into blood, by killing a third of the sea-life, and destroying a third of the seafaring crafts (8:8-9); another falls, resulting in a third of the earth's water being poisoned (8:10-11); the sun is occluded and darkness covers the earth for a third of a day (8:12); demonic forces are released, tormenting people for five months (9:1-11); demonic powers are again released to slay a third of the remaining population (9:13-19); and finally the seventh trumpet sounds (11:15), covering a period of time (10:7) which entails the war in heaven and Satan's defeat (12:7-12) and the two divinely empowered witnesses, who are eventually slain, but then raptured into God's presence (11:3-12).

Despite how terrible the things which take place under the seven trumpets may be, those who are alive remain unrepentant for their wrong-doings (9:20-21).

The seventh trumpet ends the first three and a half years of the Great Tribulation. At this point the Antichrist, who had not received much prominence, rises to power over ten kingdoms (13:1). Dake (1963, p. 295) suggests these are the ten kingdoms inside the Old Roman Empire. The Antichrist appears to suffer a fatal wound, but he is healed and the world is amazed (13:3). The source of the Antichrist's power, John reveals, is Satan (13:4) but the people of the earth give worship to the pair (13:4), the Antichrist's ferocity in warfare being seen as a virtue. The Antichrist proceeds to blaspheme (13:6) and make war against those who have become Christians (13:7) - but this shall only take place for another 42 months - the final three and a half years of the Tribulation (13:5).

Completing this "Trinity of evil", the False Prophet arrives, forcing mankind to ascribe worship to the Antichrist, even performing signs and wonders (13:11-13). It is by these signs that he is able to deceive the earth, persuading men to construct an image of the Antichrist, and indeed, those who do not worship this image are to be killed (13:14-15).

The next act of the False Prophet is to construct a mark, to be located on the right hand or forehead of each person, without which they are able to neither buy nor sell (13:16-17).

Meanwhile, in Heaven the winepress of God's wrath is being trod (14:19-20). The fulfillment of God's wrath on the earth and its wicked comes about in the form of the seven vial judgments (15:1). The first vial releases painful sores on those who have received the mark of the beast (16:2). The second vial turns the sea to blood, with all sea-life being killed (16:3). The third vial turns rivers and fountains to blood (16:4), in retribution for the blood of the martyrs shed at the hand of the Antichrist (16:5-7). The fourth vial unleashes scorching heat - but again those on the earth refused to repent (16:8-9). The fifth vial throws the earth in darkness, but again the people would not repent (16:10-11). The sixth vial sets the Euphrates river drying up, unleashing demonic agents whose purpose is to gather men to war in the plains of Megiddo, Israel (16:12-16). Finally, the seventh vial is poured out, with a great voice from heaven announcing, "It is done." A huge storm takes place, giving the largest earthquake in human history and massive hail storms (16:17-21). With this, Babylon is destroyed (18:2) - the symbol of the Antichrist's government (18:9-10) and the False Prophet's religious system. Judgment has been enacted and the blood of the martyrs has been avenged (19:2).

With this, heaven is opened (19:11) and Christ's promised Second Coming occurs - the Faithful and True, the Word of God, descends to the earth accompanied by the Church (19:11-14). The battle at Megiddo is swift, the enemies of God defeated, the Antichrist and the False Prophet cast into the lake of fire, and Satan cast into the bottomless pit (19:15-20:3). The martyred saints are resurrected and reign with Christ and the Church for a thousand years (20:4-6) - the millennium period.

At the culmination of this thousand years, Satan is loosed and immediately stirs dissension against Christ. Swiftly, all are executed by fire from heaven (20:7-9). Satan is then cast into the lake of fire also (20:10).

The final judgment takes place. All are resurrected and death and hell are cast into the lake of fire. Finally, those whose names are not found in the book of life are also cast into the lake of fire (20:11-15).

The end of this present universe draws to a close; all is destroyed and a new heaven and a new earth is made (21:1). Jerusalem descends from heaven, God announcing He shall dwell with His people forevermore (21:2-3) - there shall never again be death nor sorrow nor crying - the former things have passed away (21:4). With this, Revelation closes. The end of this entire age has passed.

The relationship of Revelation to other prophetic passages in Scripture

The depth of understanding of the consummation of this age that Revelation provides is sublime. Nevertheless, as stated, Eschatological concepts are expressed in many other passages of Scripture. Revelation further contributes to an understanding of Scripture by bringing these diverse strands into a tight, cohesive whole.

Daniel referred to the Antichrist when he spoke of a prince to come who would destroy the city and the sanctuary and bring about desolation (Daniel 9:26). This future leader would make a covenant for seven years (the final seven of Gabriel's 490) - yet in the very middle of this seven year period - after three and a half years - he would reveal his true nature (Daniel 9:27). The three and a half year period is referred to elsewhere as "time, times and half a time" (Daniel 7:24-25; Revelation 12:13-14) and "forty-two months" (Revelation 13:4-7).

The apostle Paul also spoke of the Antichrist, "whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders" (II Thessalonians 2:9). He is the "son of perdition" (II Thessalonians 2:3) and "the Wicked" (II Thessalonians 2:8), "whom the Lord shall consume", but cannot be revealed until his restrainer is removed at the rapture of the Church (II Thessalonians 2:6-7).

Daniel's vision of the little horn again refers to the Antichrist, the previous beasts and horns being the formation of Empires yet to come (Daniel 7:1-11). Daniel sees the little horn slain and destroyed (Daniel 7:11) and, in harmony with Revelation, Daniel sees the return of Christ as "one like the Son of man" coming with the clouds of heaven (Daniel 9:13). He would be given dominion and glory and a kingdom which will know no end (Daniel 9:14).

Without the book of Revelation these threads of predictive prophecy would be potentially meaningless, subject to immense speculation. Without the book, the clear sequence of events and the relationship between these prophecies would not be so noticeable.

The nature of evil

One final important contribution of the Book of Revelation to eschatology is an understanding of the nature of evil and its final overthrow. Caird (1984, p. 294) writes,

Caird John uses the most offensive language he can to delineate his spiritual enemies (Balaamite, Jezebel, fornication, monster, whore), because he is aware that they present themselves to the world in a much more attractive light. No man chooses evil because he recognises it to be evil, but always because, for the moment at least, it appears to be good. The essence of evil is deception and counterfeit. Satan is 'the deceiver of the whole world', who misleads men by telling lies about God. The monster is the Antichrist, the false Messiah, who makes blasphemous claims to deity. It bears 'deadly marks of slaughter', which are a parody of the marks on the Lamb, and its deadly wound has been healed in a mock resurrection (xiii. 3, 14). Its followers bear a brand which is a travesty of the seal of God on the foreheads of the martyrs (xiii. 16). Its title, 'was and is not and is yet to be', is a caricature of the name of God (xvii. 8; cf. i. 4).

Evil will reach its final crescendo in the Antichrist, inspired by Satan to perform false miracles (II Thessalonians 2:9; cf. Matthew 24:24; Revelation 13:11-15). Interestingly, while Paul provides a sketch of this human embodiment of evil (II Thessalonians 2:3-12), other New Testament references find Antichrist already present in heretical teachings (I John 2:18f., 22; 4:3). Nevertheless, the Eschatology drawn from the Book of Revelation reveals that the powers of evil will be completely eliminated.

Conclusion

The book of Revelation does not say who the Antichrist is. Nero, Hitler, Henry Kissinger, even Ronald Wilson Reagan (Gentry, n.d.) have been potential candidates in the minds of those eager to surmise. Further, Revelation does not reveal the identity of the two witnesses, though some would suggest Elijah, Enoch or Moses (Willmington, n.d., p. 841). Nor does Revelation reveal what the mark of the beast is. The mass usage of credit-cards and the recent advent of "smart card" technology are thought by some to be the forerunners of the mark - certainly, one will never lose a credit card if it is imprinted into one's right hand or forehead. Indeed, apart from the three and a half year interlude, Revelation does not reveal the precise timing by which the events described must transpire. Certainly the very year when the Church will be raptured and the Tribulation begun is unknown.

One must also bear in mind the difficulty before John in encapsulating the revelation he received in a written form. John writes of great stars from heaven, burning like a lamp (8:10). To the modern mind, with the advantage of a further 2,000 years of learning, this is undoubtedly a meteorite. The painful sores on those who received the mark of the beast (16:2) could potentially be the long-term effects of an implanted silicon chip. Whatever the case may be, John did not have such advanced knowledge, and thus Revelation is made harder as one strives to understand the events as described through the eyes of an ancient writer. Just as the events seen by Daniel caused him to be astonished (Daniel 9:27), so too the comprehension of events in the distant future would have been difficult for John.

Nevertheless, Revelation does tell that these things will all happen, with a certain measure of detail. One may be assured that the Antichrist will impose a mark of some description onto the remnant of humanity at that time. One may be certain that wars, famine and death will take place, no matter the countries, persons and circumstances

involved. One may be certain that without a life surrendered to Christ, there is but the lake of fire to expect.

John sought to make known the revelation of Christ that was given to him, revealing that which was to come to pass, and this is surely what he has done in this, the close of the Canon.

Pre-millennial eschatology

Introduction

The pre-millennial, pre-tribulational eschatological system is a theological framework widely held in modern times. It is the eschatological system which most literally follows scripture under consistent and proper hermeneutics (Walvoord, 1978, p. 270), and most closely represents the eschatological hope of the early Church. It further distinguishes clearly between Israel and the Church and their respective programs (Walvoord, 1978, p. 270).

This system is marked by a number of essential distinctives. It requires a futurist interpretation of the bulk of the book of Revelation. It holds to the "rapture" - the snatching away of the Church out of the world at an unknown time (I Thessalonians 4:13-18). This in turn will set in motion a series of subsequent events that will culminate in the ascendancy of the Antichrist, who will rule the world for seven years - the seven years being the final "week" of years in the angelic message to Daniel (Daniel 9:24-27) - the time of the great tribulation to come on the earth as Christ treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God (Revelation 19:15). The rule of the Antichrist will be overturned by the victorious descent of Christ at His Second Coming to the Mount of Olives with the Church (Zechariah 14; Revelation 19:11-16), who defeats him at the Battle of Armageddon, inaugurating a literal thousand-year reign (the millennium). Uninterrupted bliss would be enjoyed during this time (which is contiguous with the spiritual rebirth of Israel, the Jewish peoples acknowledging Christ as their Messiah). This would continue until Satan is "loosed" for a season (Revelation 20:7-8). Then, heaven and earth will give way to a new heaven and a new earth, the final judgment will commence, and Satan will be cast forever into eternal damnation (Revelation 20:10-21:1). The system derives its name from its chronological ordering of events: the pre-tribulational rapture and the pre-millennial tribulation.

Historical development

It has been contended by some that the pre-millennial system is a recent invention. Thomas Foster, co-founder of the Christian Revival Crusade, noted for its British-Israel doctrine, states :

Foster In 1539 Ignatius Loyola founded the Society of Jesus. Their main purpose was to bring Protestants back to the fold of Rome by any means possible. From their number there arose Francisco de Ribera, a Spanish priest, who wrote a commentary on the book of Revelation, which was printed in 1585 A.D. His thesis [pre-millennialism] was inserted in the form of notes in a Vulgate Bible, in order to counter the Protestant Reformers who had identified the Papacy as the Antichrist, and the Catholic Church as the "Babylon" of Revelation 18:5. . . . Dr Maitland discovered this Futurist view of the Revelation, as taught by Francisco Ribera from Spain, and he published it just for the sake of interest. About this time, 1841, the Plymouth Brethren were formed. . . . Their leader was John Nelson Darby and he eagerly read and accepted the Futurist view of Revelation. . . . little realizing that the Plymouth Brethren from then on would be preaching a Roman Catholic message on the Revelation! (Foster, 1983, p. 1-3)

Whether Foster's view have any historical truth or not, John Nelson Darby is often considered the "founder" of pre-millennialism (Cartledge, n.d., p. 157). It would be

more correct to say Darby was the founder of *dispensational* pre-millennialism (Zoba, 1995, p. 21), for the faith of the early Church was undoubtedly *chiliasm* - based on the Greek word in Revelation 20:3 denoting the number 1,000.

Chiliasm was an ill-defined pre-millennial outlook (Zoba, 1995, p. 21; Berkhof, 1975, p. 262) which anticipated the imminent return of Christ, and His reign for a literal thousand years before the final judgment. Unfortunately some were inclined to dwell fondly on their millennial hopes in a crassly materialistic manner, such as Papias and Irenaeus (Berkhof, 1975, p. 262).

In the fourth century, the great Christian thinker, Augustine rejected the literal and materialistic notions behind chiliasm, concluding that the kingdom of God was already manifest in the presence of the Church. The age between Pentecost and the return of Christ was seen to be the very millennium itself, marked by the ever-increasing influence of the Church in overturning evil in the world before Christ's return (Zoba, 1995, p. 20) - the first incarnation of post-millennial thinking, although by the end of the first millennium A.D. this line of thought developed into a-millennialism, the denial of any literal thousand year period. Berkhof (1975, p. 262) suggests Augustine's thinking was influenced by the material success of the Church since Constantine's edict of tolerance. Indeed, during the Middle Ages the thought of a literal millennium was generally regarded as heretical (Berkhof, 1975, p. 263). The post-millennial position was refined and further developed by Daniel Whitby (Cartledge, n.d., p. 115) but can no longer be held with any serious thought due to the succession of wars experienced in this century.

Pre-millennial thought was revived after being meticulously delineated by Baptist lay preacher William Miller in the early and mid-1800s. His views fell into disrepute after two failed attempts to set a date for the Lord's return (Zoba, 1995, p. 20-21).

The next rebirth occurred with John Nelson Darby in the late 1850s in the form of dispensational pre-millennialism, mentioned above - the notion that God interacts with humanity in a series of epochs or dispensations. "Darby wove these diverse strands into a tight cohesive system that he buttressed at every point by copious biblical proof texts, then tirelessly promoted through his writing and preaching tours" (Zoba, 1995, p. 21).

Cyrus Scofield popularised this system of belief with the publication of his Reference Bible and catapulted it into the Protestant mainstream (Zoba, 1995, p. 21).

The rapture and the tribulation

Pre-millennial eschatology holds to a "rapture", or catching up, of the Church at a future and unknown time, to be with Jesus in the air. This is based largely on I Thessalonians 4:15-17 and I Corinthians 15:51-52. It is inexorably intertwined with the "tribulation" period which is to follow, and essentially the purpose of the rapture is to deliver the Church which God has ordained for salvation (I Thessalonians 5:9) from the time of wrath to come - the tribulation.

This period will have seven years duration, being the final of Daniel's heptads (Daniel 9:24-27), designated specifically for Israel and the Jewish people. It is identified in scripture as a time of trouble (Daniel 12:1), the time of Jacob's Trouble (Jeremiah 30:4-7), the great Day of the Lord (Zephaniah 1:14-18; I Thessalonians 5:2; Revelation 6:16-17), the great tribulation (Matthew 24:21, 29; Revelation 2:22; 7:14) and the wrath of God (Zephaniah 1:15; Revelation 6:16-17; 11:18; 14:10; 15:1; 16:1). This wrath will be unleashed upon the world (Revelation 15:7) and will test those who dwell upon the earth (Revelation 3:10) and purge the nation of Israel (Daniel 11:35; Zechariah 13:8-9).

The pre-millennial system holds to a futurist interpretation of the Book of Revelation from 4:1 onwards and this is believed to outline the events from the rapture, detailing specifically the tribulation period.

The bema seat of Christ

The raptured Saints are most active during the ensuing seven year period. Immediately judgment is enacted on the Christians at Christ's judgment seat. It is important to understand the nature of this judgment. As Dr. Lehman Strauss states,

Strauss In the large olympic arenas, there was an elevated seat on which the judge of the contest sat. After the contests were over, the successful competitors would assemble before the *bema* to receive their rewards or crowns. The *bema* was not a judicial bench where someone was condemned; it was a reward seat. Likewise, the Judgment Seat of Christ is not a judicial bench. ... (Willmington, n.d., p. 827)

Christ's judgment seat is not a negative one; the materials to be judged are the individual believer's works for Christ (I Corinthians 3:10-13). These works are classified as gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay and stubble. It is unwise to speculate on what acts fall into each of the above categories, but it is most likely that acts out of a pure motive, with God-given talents, for the cause of Christ will fall into the higher categories. Nevertheless, at the Bema seat no person shall be cast from Christ's presence; rather rewards will be given based on the result of the testing of one's acts (I Corinthians 3:14).

The marriage supper of the Lamb

Immediately following shall be the marriage supper of the lamb. This is described through Jesus' parables (Matthew 22:2; 25:1; Luke 12:35-36) and through John's revelation (Revelation 19:7). The bridegroom is the Lord Jesus Christ (John 3:27-30; Luke 5:32-35) - the very lamb of God (John 1:29) and the bride is the very Church who has been presented without spot or blemish, perfected through Christ's sanctifying work (Ephesians 5:22-32; II Corinthians 11:2). Christ has given His life for the Church (Matthew 20:28) and so shall the Church be with the Lord forever (I Thessalonians 4:17)!

The Antichrist

A different scene transpires on the earth however. The son of destruction, the lawless one (II Thessalonians 2:2-7) will make his appearance, but only after the Church (his restrainer) has been raptured. By searching the scriptures a mosaic of this end-time figure's life may be painted.

Undoubtedly society will be troubled both by its increasing lawlessness (II Timothy 3:1-5), but also by the sudden disappearance of millions of people - the Church. "Two men will be in the field;" Christ said, "one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left" (Matthew 24:40-41). Willmington (n.d., p. 827) attempts to describe the confusion and alarm upon the earth at this time. It is conceivable that a troubled society will produce the atmosphere for a dictator such as the Antichrist, and his personality will draw many to him. Yet it is certain that his is not a government given by God :

Daniel 8:23-25	In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue, will arise. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people. He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power.
Daniel 11:37-38	He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them.

Immediately the Antichrist seeks to resolve the world's problems. He begins by confirming a peace treaty in the Middle East between Israel and the Muslim nations for a seven year period (Daniel 9:27). Yet, as Paul warns, while people are saying "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly (I Thessalonians 5:3). The Antichrist breaks the treaty in the middle of this seven years (Daniel 9:27) and commits the "abomination of desolation" spoken of by Daniel and by Jesus, until the end that is decreed is poured out upon him (Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14).

The second half of the tribulation

During the reign of the Antichrist in the former three and a half years of the tribulation period, war and famine, plague and death occurred (Revelation 6:1-11). Earthquakes occur, the sun becomes black, the moon like blood and even the very stars shall appear to fall (Revelation 6:12-13), perhaps referring to meteor strikes (Dake, 1963, p. 290).

Nevertheless, the situation is dramatically different in the second half of the tribulation period. John provides a parenthetical view behind the scenes - at the spirit realm where war in the heavenly realms takes place (Revelation 12:7-17). Satan, it may be seen, is the real force behind the evil occurring. He fought with Michael the archangel, but was cast down from heaven with his angelic followers. Seeking to enact revenge, Satan, the dragon, gives power to the Antichrist, the beast (Revelation 13:4).

With Satanic empowerment, the Antichrist appears to suffer a fatal wound yet is seemingly miraculously healed (Revelation 13:3). The Antichrist even orders a particular mark be emblazoned on the right hand or forehead of people, without which they may not buy or sell (Revelation 13:16-17) - but with which one will be damned (Revelation 14:9-11). The False Prophet arises, instituting a religious system involving worship of the image of the beast (Revelation 13:11-15), the penalty for failure to comply being death.

The seven bowl judgements of Revelation 16 are next enacted: grievous sores on those who had received the mark or worshipped the image; the seas become as blood; the rivers and fountains become as blood; the sun scorches with its heat; darkness covers the earth; the Euphrates dries up and demonic armies are released; and widespread destruction takes place - lightning, hail and an enormous earthquake that flattens the cities of the earth and destroys the islands and mountains.

The return of Jesus

The tribulation draws to a spectacular close when suddenly John sees heaven open and he beholds a white horse - the rider is the Faithful and the True and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes were as a flame of fire and on his

head were many crowns. His name is the Word of God and on his thigh is written "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (Revelation 19:11-13, 16). The tribulation, and indeed this present age, are virtually at a cataclysmic end, with the promised return of Jesus Christ, accompanied by the perfected raptured Church (Revelation 19:14).

With swift judgment the battle of Armageddon takes place. The Antichrist and the False Prophet are cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20), their followers are slain (Revelation 19:21) and Satan is bound in a bottomless pit (Revelation 20:1-3).

The millennium

Thus begins the millennium period. Christ and the Saints reign over the earth for a thousand years. The earth is restored, every valley is raised, the rugged becomes a plain (Isaiah 40:4). Longevity, such as before the flood, becomes common - indeed he who dies at a hundred is thought to be a mere youth (Isaiah 65:20). Animals dwell together in peace (Isaiah 65:25).

At the culmination of this period, however, Satan is loosed and he immediately proceeds to deceive the nations, organising a rebellion against Christ's kingdom. This rebellion is short-lived with fire coming from heaven and devouring all (Revelation 20:7-9).

The end of this age

Immediately Satan himself is cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10). The great judgment occurs - all are judged and those not found in the book of life are also cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

The present heavens and earth pass away and all things are made new. The new Jerusalem descends from heaven and John hears a voice say, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people and God himself shall be with them and be their God" (Revelation 21:1-3).

Conclusion

As may be seen, the pre-millennial position is not lacking for scriptural support. Nevertheless it must be conceded that some of the interpretations required are problematic. Croucher (n.d.) states, "This view robs the book [of Revelation] of all value for the early Christians, and, indeed, for all subsequent generations right up to the last". This is an important objection, especially when one considers the opinions of those who give Revelation an early dating, placing it in the midst of Roman persecution. Indeed, the beast worship of Revelation 13:15 bears a remarkable resemblance to the Emperor worship required in such times. The "abomination of desolations" is very reminiscent of Antiochus IV's sacrificing of pigs in the Temple (Stern, 1992, p. 827) - although Jesus' mention of this event requires it to have a later fulfillment. However, unlike other systems such as Preterism, pre-millennialism is independent of when Revelation was written.

It also must be questioned if Revelation has a strict chronological ordering, given that prophetic works like Jeremiah do not, and the existence of passages labelled as "parenthetical" such as Revelation 12. Furthermore, such an interpretation of Revelation requires a relatively non-literal understanding of "the time is at hand" (Revelation 22:10) and "the things which shall be hereafter" (Revelation 1:19), given that the events of Revelation will not take place until at least 1,900 years after John saw them. Yet, this is mixed with a strictly literal understanding of the seven year period, the thousand year period, and even the 144,000 Jews who are saved during the tribulation. Yet, elsewhere in the scriptures such numbers are taken to be

figurative. If the Lord literally owned the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10), He would be no more wealthy than a modern-day cattle rancher.

Ultimately, however, it must be concluded that if the pre-millennial framework does err, it does so on the side of being too literal, rather than too figurative such as is the case with post-millennialism. Indeed, Walvoord (1979, p. 270) states that pre-millennialism is the only view which allows a literal interpretation of all the Old and New Testament passages pertaining to the tribulation. It is the only view which preserves the unity of Daniel's seventieth heptad, clearly distinguishing between Israel and the Church.

Every Christian must ensure they are like the "faithful and wise servant" who ran his master's household assiduously while waiting for the master's return (Matthew 24:45-46). In the words of J. I. Packer, the Christian must live "packed up and ready to go, and packed up and ready to wait" (Zoba, 1995, p. 23).

The different views of the rapture

Introduction

The rapture is an area of Christian theology which has historically received little attention with regards to precise formulation. A brief survey of works detailing the development of doctrine (such as Bromiley, 1978) reveals almost no acknowledgment of the rapture. This is perhaps explained by Berkhof (1975, p. 259) who states,

Berkhof The doctrine of the last things never stood in the centre of attention, is one of the least developed doctrines, and therefore calls for no elaborate discussion.

Further, the very notion of the rapture is much-derided by critics who find fault due to the allegedly non-existence of such a doctrine in the scriptures; the seemingly non-existence of the very word "rapture" in the scriptures (though such an argument would apply to the Trinity also); and the thought that the idea of a "secret rapture" where the Church is transported safely from a catastrophic time of tribulation is foreign to God's plans and purposes as revealed in history - for indeed, "the blood of the martyrs is the very seed of the Church" (Caims, 1981, p.93).

Such arguments are untenable. The main basis for the rapture doctrine is I Thessalonians 4:13-18 :

I Thessalonians 4:13-18 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

From this passage the notion of the rapture is clear; at some future time all of the saints of God, both dead and alive, shall be "caught up" into the air to be with their Lord! The Greek word for "caught up" is **arpazw**, which means to pluck away (Zodhiates, 1992, p. 1270) and would be well translated "rapture" in a Latin Bible (Willmington, n.d, p. 825), such as Jerome's vulgate - so the word itself is scriptural (just not in an English translation), as indeed is the notion. The third objection listed is specific to a particular theological framework and shall be discussed later. Indeed, many objections exist, not least that of sincere Christian brethren who seek to know what must happen to the defenceless family pet when its owners are suddenly raptured! Such an argument is, of course, based on emotional issues rather than the scriptures and detracts from the real issue at hand.

Paul reveals more information in I Corinthians 15:51-52 :

I Corinthians 15:51-52 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

Having established a preliminary scriptural basis for the rapture, however, a new problem arises with regards to its chronological location. As Stern (1992, p.623) points out, "Only in relation to the premillennial position does the issue of when the rapture takes place arise; for Post- and Amillennialists, the Rapture is vaguely identified with the Messiah's one and only return.)" This means that the concept of the rapture is only particularly defined in the pre-millennial system of theology. However, this leaves three potential general times for the rapture to occur, defined in terms of the coming "great tribulation" - before the tribulation period (pre-tribulational), during the tribulation period (mid-tribulational) or after the tribulation period (post-tribulational). Some humourously (and non-seriously) suggest a fourth possibility of "pan-tribulationalism" - as God is in control there is no need to worry about such matters; all will eventually "pan" out according to His plans. The former three views however, are worthy of considerable discussion.

Post-tribulation

In essence, the post-tribulational system decrees that the rapture occurs after the tribulation period - the natural consequence being that the Church must endure it. Willmington (n.d., p. 825) dismisses this view of the rapture by appealing to I Thessalonians 5:9 ("For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ") and Revelation 3:10 ("Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth").

Nevertheless, post-tribulationists dismiss Willmington's views, appealing to John 16:33, "in this world you will have tribulation". To the post-tribulationist, it is unthinkable that God would offer a remarkable transport to the Church as an escape route in the face of global disaster, eluded to earlier (although such was the case with Noah). Truly throughout history the Church has suffered persecution - indeed under such persecution the Church has historically thrived - not materially, but in a spiritual harvest, as faith is refined and tested and the gospel is propagated to further regions. This was the case in Jerusalem - "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went" (Acts 8:4). This was the case under Roman persecution (Cairns, 1981, p. 91-93). Persecution kept the Church pure - it kept hypocritical, dishonest and insincere people from the Church. "No light decisions were made for Christ in those times, especially when acceptance of Christ meant possible loss of citizenship; imprisonment with daily starvation and torture until death; crucifixion, and sometimes burning while still alive and hanging on the cross. . . ." (Hamon, 1981, p. 80-81). Such is the essence of the Puritan classic, *Foxe's Christian Martyrs of the World*.

The flaw in this logic, however, is that the tribulation period is not a time of persecution. Rather, it is a time of God's wrath being outpoured on the earth. During this time people shall cry to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Revelation 6:16-17). When Christ returns, "He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty" (Revelation 19:15). Willmington's verses above apply most certainly - for God has appointed His Church to salvation and not to wrath. Surely the day of the Lord will be terrible (Malachi 4:5) !

Messianic Jewish scholar David Stern offers a different and original reason for his holding to the post-tribulation view - it is unthinkable "that Messianic Jews are to be

faced with the decision of whether to identify with their own people the Jews and stay to suffer or with their own people the believers (the Messianic Community, the Church) and escape" (Stern, 1992, p. 623). Stern develops this idea further :

Stern But if Sha'ul [Paul] and other Jewish believers are members both of Israel and of the Messianic Community, Pre-Tribulationists must answer this question: when the rapture takes place, do Jewish believers in Yeshua [Jesus] stay behind with the rest of physical Israel, or do they join the rest of the Messianic Community with Yeshua in the air? They can't be in both places at once. Is it a matter of our personal choice? Do we have to choose whether to be more loyal to the Jewish people or to our brothers in the Messiah? This is an absurd question, absurd because the situation proposed will never arise (Stern, 1992, p. 804).

Stern's objections, however, are based heavily on his emphasis that Jewish people remain Jewish once becoming Christians; indeed, they are "fulfilled" Jews. This is, of course, true, but Stern's emphasis is so great that he (unintentionally, but effectively) divides the body of Christ in two - those who are Jewish and those who are Gentiles, despite Paul's admonition that "there is neither Jew nor Greek. . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Stern continues, ". . . . This is not what they [Messianic Jews] bought into when they came to faith. They were told, 'Now you're a Jew who has accepted his Messiah.' They were not told, 'Now you have abandoned your Jewish people and will spend eternity without them'" (Stern, 1992, p. 804). Certainly the Gentile Christian is distinct from the Gentile non-Christian (who will unquestionably remain after the rapture). The deciding factor is not whether one is Jewish or otherwise, but whether one is a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ or not.

Finally, the rapture is quite distinct from the Second Coming in which Jesus returns to the earth, to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14). At the rapture, Jesus draws the Saints to Himself in the clouds (I Thessalonians 4:15-17). At the Second Coming, He returns *with* the Saints (Revelation 19:11-16). The post-tribulational view virtually has the Saints of God acting like a yo-yo - arising into the air, only to return immediately to the earth. This further gives no time for the Bema seat of Christ or the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Mid-tribulation

The mid-tribulation view of the rapture is that it will take place midway through the tribulation period.

Such a view is a curious exposition of scripture, for the Antichrist makes a covenant with the Jewish people and then breaks it three and a half years into the tribulation (Daniel 9:27). Even if the mid-tribulation rapture occurs earlier than this time, it still must take place after the Antichrist has been revealed, which can only happen after the "restrainer" is removed (II Thessalonians 2:7-8).

Some have suggested that the identity of the "restrainer" is the Antichrist himself - a non-sensical notion indeed, particularly in light of Paul's teaching that "the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed" (II Thessalonians 2:7-8). Others suggest the "restrainer" is the Holy Spirit (Dake, 1963, p. 230). However, John sees those who have become Christians during the tribulation, and martyred for their faith (Revelation 7:14). It is only by the work of the Holy Spirit that one can be brought to Christ (John 16:8), not by man, and so the Holy Spirit can not be the "restrainer" removed from the earth. The "restrainer" is in fact none other than the Church - the "salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13) and the "light of

the world" (Matthew 5:14). Hence, the Church must be raptured before the Antichrist may be revealed and so the mid-tribulation view of the Antichrist being revealed before the rapture is not possible.

Furthermore, the mid-tribulation position requires the tribulation to be broken into two unrelated halves, which has the potential for requiring many Biblical passages to have an allegorical interpretation in order to be consistent. For one, the seventieth "week" of years of Daniel's remarkable prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27) could not be for "his" (Daniel's) people - the Jews (Daniel 9:24) - it would also of necessity pertain to the Church.

One possible basis for the mid-tribulation rapture is the inability to distinguish between the rapture of the Church and the rapture of the two witnesses which does take place midway through the tribulation period (Revelation 11:3, 7, 11). However, the two witnesses are hardly representative of the entire Church and it must be concluded that they are quite separate.

Some scholars identify the "last trump" of I Corinthians 15:52 with the blowing of the "seventh trumpet" in the middle of the tribulation (Revelation 11:15-18). Rosenthal (1995, p. 5) states, "One of the major fallacies which has led to so much confusion in prophetic interpretation has been the tendency to identify Paul's 'last trump' with 'the seventh trumpet' of the Book of Revelation".

Due to the fact that I Corinthians was written about 55 A.D. and Revelation was written about 96 A.D. (some would say 70 A.D., but nevertheless, it was written after I Corinthians and Paul's martyrdom). Explicitly John states that the contents of the book of Revelation were given by God the Father to the Lord Jesus, who in turn used an angelic messenger to convey the message to John (Revelation 1:1-2). The very word "revelation" means an unveiling of that which was hitherto unknown or concealed. Rosenthal (1995, p. 5) continues,

Rosenthal Therefore, when Paul wrote of one generation of believers experiencing rapture (being "changed") at "the last trump," neither he nor the Corinthians knew anything concerning the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls of the Book of Revelation. Paul's "last trump" and the Book of Revelation's "seventh trumpet" are not synonymous.

The true meaning of "the last trump" requires an understanding of the Jewish notion of the "Day of the Lord" used nineteen times by eight Old Testament prophets. This was the future time when God would go to war (Rosenthal, 1995, p. 5). Associated with this would be the blowing of a trumpet - the Jewish shofar (Joel 1:15; 2:1; Zephaniah 1:14-16). Indeed, the phrase "the last trump" hardly shows a mid-tribulation rapture because it instead refers to the *commencement* of the very last time of battle in this age - the very start of the dreadful Day of the Lord - the tribulation period itself.

Pre-tribulation

The pre-tribulation view may be summarised thus,

H&W It was held that the return of Christ would take place in two stages. First there would be a quiet appearance of Christ when all true Christians would be taken from the earth - the 'rapture' of the saints. After this, Antichrist's reign would continue but be brought to an end by the appearing of Christ in glory and the introduction of a 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth from Jerusalem (Humphreys & Ward, 1995, p. 128-9).

If the book of Revelation is to be taken as a chronological work, which most futurists would agree, there is great significance in the similarities between I Thessalonians 4:16-17 above and Revelation 4:1-2 - again a voice like a trumpet is heard and John is transported instantly through a door in heaven to the very throne-room of God.

Indeed, the very "door" is significant to those who see a secondary meaning in the seven Churches of Revelation chapters 1-3, being the historical development of the Church over history, from the early Church to that at the time of the Second Coming. With this view the door of Revelation 3:10, opened to the Philadelphian Church, is equated with that of Revelation 4:1 (Cartledge, n.d., p. 119). This view then equates the lukewarm Laodecian Church as the false religious system that arises during the tribulation. Such a view however is counter-productive as the Philadelphian Church is still part of the Church and so requires the Church to be divided - the lukewarm left behind, which implies a Protestant purgatory.

Nevertheless, there is great significance in the fact that John is told to "Come up hither" (Revelation 4:1) - the very same words spoken to the two witnesses before they too are raptured (Revelation 11:12). Further, the Church is remarkably absent from any of the proceedings from Revelation 4:1 to 19:11 when Christ returns - indeed, the Church surely has no part in the tribulation.

Not only so, but the tribulation period is the final "week" of years in Daniel's prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27), specifically designated for the Jewish people. The times of the Gentiles are complete, and God again turns His hand to His ancient peoples, the end result that at His Second Coming the Jews will look on Him whom they have pierced (Zechariah 12:10) and all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26) - the Messiah they expected at Jesus' first coming will finally arrive (Edersheim, 1993, p. 113) !

Conclusion

The honest Christian theologian can do nothing less than assimilate the data of revelation provided in the scriptures and draw from this one's theology and framework of belief. To do otherwise is wrong, and one must not be persuaded by purely emotional arguments, or seek to manipulate scripture to conform to a preconceived world-view.

When one examines the conflicting views of the rapture in the pre-millennial framework, it becomes apparent that the only one which consistently fits the facts of Biblical data is the pre-tribulation view. Certainly as Christians we look not for tribulation, but for "His Son from heaven who has delivered us from the wrath to come" (I Thessalonians 1:10). The early Church expected the coming of the Lord imminently and did not expect any intervening events, especially the Thessalonians (Matthew 24:44; I Thessalonians 5:2).

Just as Noah and his family were saved from God's wrath (Genesis 7:6-7), as was Lot and his daughters (Genesis 19:14), and indeed the Children of Israel were saved from the plagues on Pharaoh (Exodus 7:18; 8:3, 21-22; 9:3-4; 10:22-23; 11:6-7), so too the Church shall be saved from the coming great tribulation by the rapture.

The Christian is commanded to look up - for their redemption draws near (Luke 21:28)! What can be said but "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." (Revelation 22:20).

The Anti-Christ, Satan, and Israel in eschatology

Introduction

Three important areas of eschatology are those concerning the Antichrist, Satan, and the nation of Israel and the Jewish people. Indeed, the three are invariably linked in the end-times panorama.

Henri Spaak, secretary of N.A.T.O. and planner of the E.E.C. has said,

Spaak We do not want another committee. We have too many already. What we want is a man of sufficient stature to hold the allegiance of all people and to lift us out of the economic morass into which we are sinking. Send us such a man and whether he be God or devil, we will receive him (Cartledge, n.d., p. 132).

Such a leader, the Bible teaches, will appear, and unfortunately for mankind, he shall indeed be Satanically inspired.

Morris writes,

Morris Satan is a malignant reality, always hostile to God and to God's people. But he has already been defeated in Christ's life and death and resurrection, and this defeat will become obvious and complete in the end of the age (Morris, 1980, p. 1397).

The Antichrist

The expression "*antichristos*" is found only in the epistles of John (I John 2:18, 22; 4:3; II John 7). Nevertheless, the idea behind it is widespread. Morris makes the important point that one should understand "the force of *anti* as indicating opposition, rather than a false claim" (Morris, 1980a, p. 69, also Horton, 1994, p. 628) - that is, the Antichrist is one who opposes Christ rather than one who claims to be the Christ. Given this, passages bearing on the Antichrist also include such as Daniel 7:7f, 21f, and those in II Thessalonians 2 and Revelation which deal with the strong opposition that the forces of evil are to offer Christ in the last days.

John introduces the notion of the Antichrist as something already well known ("you have heard that Antichrist is coming", I John 2:18) and although he does not dispute the fact that at the end of this age there will appear an evil being, called "Antichrist" (indeed, Paul treats the non-appearance of the Antichrist as an indication that the end is not yet in II Thessalonians 2:3-12), John insists that there is "a temper, an attitude, characteristic of Antichrist, and that already exists" (Morris, 1980a, p. 69). John in fact, spoke of "many Antichrists" as already in the world (I John 2:18).

John goes some way towards giving a definition when he states, "This is the Antichrist, he who denies the Father and Son" (I John 2:22) and they who refuse to acknowledge "the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh" (II John 7). To John, it is basic that in Jesus Christ, God has acted for humanity's salvation (I John 4:9f). Morris contends that when one denies this, they are not simply guilty of doctrinal error.

Rather, they are undercutting the very foundation of the Christian faith. Indeed, they are doing the work of Satan in opposing the things of God (Morris, 1980, p. 70).

At the end of this age, this will characterise the work of the supreme embodiment of evil, the Antichrist himself. Those who do the same thing now, demonstrate by this very fact, that they are his henchmen.

The Antichrist represents the principle of Satanic opposition to God's rule and the ongoing activities of His Church, active throughout history (Bauckham, 1980, p. 473). Nevertheless, the final Antichrist himself can only be revealed when the Church is raptured from the earth (II Thessalonians 2:7). During this time he martyrs many who become Christians (Revelation 6:9).

In summary, Morris (1980, p. 70) writes,

Morris Paul thinks of the supreme effort of Satan as not in the past, but in the future. He does not think of the world as gradually evolving into a perfect state, but of evil as continuing right up till the last time. Then evil will make its greatest challenge to good, and this challenge will be led by the mysterious figure who owes his power to Satan, and who is the instrument of Satan's culminating challenge to the things of God [the Antichrist]. Paul is sure of the outcome. Christ will consume the man of lawlessness 'with the breath of his mouth' [II Thessalonians 2:8]. The last, supreme challenge of Satan will be defeated.

Satan

The Antichrist is not Satan, but his coming is "by the activity of Satan" (II Thessalonians 2:9).

Satan literally means "adversary" (Morris, 1980b, p. 1396), and this is precisely how he acts in Job. Furthermore, he is consistently engaged in activities against the best interests of mankind. He moves David to number the people (I Chronicles 21:1). He stands by Joshua the High Priest "to accuse him" (Zechariah 3:1f). Indeed, Psalm 109:6 informs that it is a calamity to have Satan at one's right hand. John writes that "the devil sinned from the beginning" (I John 3:8) and the Biblical evidence bears witness to this.

Satan is consistently hostile to God and is ever present in working to overthrow the purposes of God and His Church. Matthew and Luke record Satan's attempts to tempt Christ (Matthew 4; Luke 4). Satan was unable to succeed, but he left Christ "until an opportune time," implying he would be watchful for when he could next strike.

Satan's opposition to the activities of the Church and the propagation of the gospel is most evident. Peter stresses the fierce opposition by saying that the devil "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (I Peter 5:8). Paul thinks of his cunning when he states, "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (II Corinthians 11:14), so it is most conceivable that his minions can appear in a favourable guise. Satan worked through Jesus' followers, as when Peter rejected the thought of the cross and was met with the rebuke, "Get behind me, Satan" (Matthew 16:23) - in fact, Satan had further intentions with Peter but the Lord prayed for him (Luke 22:31f). Certainly Satan worked through the enemies of Christ for He could say of them that they were of their "father the devil" (John 8:44). The activity of Judas is ascribed to Satan (Luke 22:3; John 13:2, 27).

Indeed, Satan continues to work against the Church. He continues to tempt men (I Corinthians 7:5). He is at work both among professed believers ("Why has Satan filled

your heart?", Acts 5:3) and those actively opposed to Christianity ("You son of the devil", Acts 13:10). Indeed, John states the general principle, "He who commits sin is of the devil" (I John 3:8).

Moreso, humans can actually give themselves over to Satan so that in effect, they belong to him, becoming his "children" (I John 3:10). Thus there may exist "a synagogue of Satan" (Revelation 2:9; 3:9) and men who dwell "where Satan's throne is" (Revelation 2:13).

Satan hinders the work of missionaries (I Thessalonians 2:18). He takes away the good seed sown in people's hearts (Mark 4:15).

Always Satan is pictured as being resourceful and active. The Ephesians are exhorted to put on "the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11), and there are references to "the snare of the devil" (I Timothy 3:7; II Timothy 2:26). The Church (and even Michael the archangel, Jude 9) are engaged in a conflict that is both "relentlessly and cunningly waged. They are not in a position to retire from the conflict" (Morris, 1980b, p. 1396).

Nevertheless, the New Testament is sure of Satan's limitations and defeat. His power is derivative and may only be exercised within the limits that God has set (Job 1:12; 2:6; Luke 4:6; I Corinthians 10:13; Revelation 20:2, 7). The Church is to resist the devil "firm in your faith" (I Peter 5:9). James exhorts to "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Paul indicates to "give no opportunity to the devil" (Ephesians 4:27) and the implication of wearing the full armour of God is that the believer will be able to resist anything the evil one does (Ephesians 6:11). Satan is always seeking to "gain the advantage over us", but "we are not ignorant of his designs" (II Corinthians 2:11).

Israel

Paul's statement that "not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" (Romans 9:6) is in line with the prophetic insistence that the true people of God, those who are worthy of the name of Israel, may be but a relatively small "remnant" of faithful souls within the nation of Israel (Bruce, 1980, p. 719).

This is evidenced in John the Baptist's preaching that descent from Abraham is valueless in itself (Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8). Jesus called His disciples to form the "little flock" who were to receive the Kingdom (Luke 12:32), to be augmented by the accession of "other sheep" who had never belonged to the Jewish fold (John 10:16).

Paul makes reference elsewhere to "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16). This phrase occurs but once in the New Testament, and has caused considerable controversy, and a proper understanding of it is essential for a proper understanding of Israel's role in Eschatology, and indeed Christian theology in general. Dr. Stern (1992, p. 571-576) examines the verse in great detail.

Stern firstly denies "Replacement theology" which holds that the Church is the New Israel, which has replaced the Jews, the so-called "Old Israel," who are therefore no longer God's people. However, "neither this verse nor any other part of the New Testament teaches this false and anti-Semitic doctrine" (Stern, 1992, p. 571-572). Neither does it teach the opposite, that it excludes all non-Jews (Stern, 1992, p. 572).

Rather, the verse reads, "Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16). According to Stern, Paul was make an allusion to the main synagogue prayer, the *'Amidah* (Standing Prayer) or *Shmoneh-Esreh* (Eighteen Benedictions) - "it is the key to this verse" (Stern, 1992, p. 572).

Apparently the *'Amidah* was then and is now the central element of synagogue worship, literally saying "Put **peace**, goodness and blessing, grace and kindness **and mercy upon us and upon all Israel**, your people". Stern believes that without doubt Paul's Messianic Jewish readers and the Judaizers would have noticed this allusion immediately. The majority of Gentile readers would have realised this also, having likely spent time in synagogues - if not, the Judaizers would undoubtedly have brought it to their attention (Stern, 1992, p. 572).

In the synagogue service, the "us" of the *'Amidah* refers to the congregation reciting the prayer; they are part of "all Israel," but by saying, "and upon all Israel," they ask God to extend the requested blessing of peace beyond themselves to the entire people of God - the congregation is not "all Israel," but it is a subset of it. By referring to "the Israel of God," Saul extends his prayer to refer to believers outside Galatia as well as his readers. Moreso, however, Paul has particularly used the word Israel. In his time, "Israel" was Jewish jargon and only used by those acquainted with Jewish writings (Stern, 1992, p. 573). All Greek speaking Jews and Gentiles said "*Ioudaioi*" (Judean) when referring to the Jews, but Jews reserved the word "Israel" to refer to themselves as God's people - the people of promise - whereas Gentiles did not use this word at all.

Stern continues, suggesting that the Judaizers exploited the meaning of "Israel" to appeal to the Gentile's pride - so that by getting themselves circumcised, they would be joining God's "fashionable elite" (Stern, 1992, p. 573). Stern thus concludes that the word "Israel" is here used as a synonym for God's people. Indeed, the "Israel of God" is best defined as "those who are genuinely God's people" (Stern, 1992, p. 573). This is in contrast to the Judaizers who may in *some* sense be "Israel" but are not "of God." The Living Bible renders this verse simply, "mercy. . . upon those everywhere who are really God's own."

A second problematic passage which contributes to an Eschatological understanding of "Israel" is Revelation 7:3-9 :

Revelation 7:3-9 "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, . . . From the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

John then proceeds to describe the great multitude that he also saw, from every nation, tribe, people and language.

The identity of this 144,000 has been the subject of much debate. The Jehovah's Witnesses have constructed a class system, whereby the 144,000 represents only those Christians who shall reign with Jesus; the remainder staying on earth. Such a notion however, is based on the organisation's doctrine, rather than Scripture.

Caird (1984, p. 95) states "The hundred and forty-four thousand. . . are identical with the great throng from every nation." Beasley-Murray (1981, p. 141) suggests John has modified an old Jewish apocalyptic prophecy and concludes that "John deliberately composed the passage verses 1-8 to represent the Church as the new Israel and the followed it in verses 9-17 by a picture of the Church of all nations victorious in the kingdom." Neither of these views are satisfactory, as John explicitly distinguishes the two groups from each other, going so far as to name the individual twelve tribes.

Willmington (n.d., p. 841) suggests that the 144,000 are "Hebrew Billy Sundays" whose purpose is to evangelise the world. Curtis (1994, p. 109) explains this notion,

Curtis ... they are a select group of Jewish converts to the Messiah who, in the wake of 'Tribulation' judgments. ... turn to Jesus as Lord. They are then 'sealed' to preach the gospel to the world during this period after the church has been raptured.

Curtis (1994, p. 110) poses another view,

Curtis ... they represent the full measure of God's fulfilling His commitment to His chosen people, the Jews. the Word of God clearly states that He has not left Israel derelict from His purposes (Rom. 9-11). Though they were 'broken off' (Rom. 11:17), there shall come a 'resurrection' of His purposed will for national Israel (Rom. 11:18) and a full complement of Jews shall be among the redeemed of all nations (Rom. 11:26).

It is unlikely that the 144,000 represent the full complement of the Jewish people who will turn to Jesus for Scripture seems to indicate that all Israel will be saved at the conclusion of the Tribulation (Zechariah 9:14-17; Romans 10:26) whereas the 144,000 are literal people in the midst of the Tribulation. Nevertheless, they do represent Jewish people, quite likely those who become Christians during the Tribulation period.

Many distortions have been applied to the passages discussed to support the erroneous notion that God has abandoned His ancient people. Nevertheless, Daniel's seventy heptads were expressly decreed for "his" people - the Jews. Paul asks, "Did God reject his people? By no means!" (Romans 11:1) When the Bible refers to Israel, one may be well assured that Israel is literally meant.

With this understanding, Israel has an eschatological role to play and is important in the panorama of end-time events. Matarasso, a Messianic Jew, explains that at the beginning of the Tribulation the Antichrist "will need a new centre. He will choose Jerusalem, and the Jews will be forced back into focus, to remain there for the rest of time" (Matarasso, n.d., 11.2). The Antichrist will make a seven-year pact with Israel (Daniel 9:27) - "an agreement with hell" (Isaiah 28:15, 18). Matarasso continues,

Matarasso The Jews will sign it because it will seem to give them all that they have fought for so long - absolute security, the right to rebuild their Temple, and both protection against Russia to the north and the Arab states round about. Many Jews will hail the Beast [Antichrist] as Messiah. He will be the last false messiah they will ever enthrone (Matarasso, n.d., 11.2).

The Antichrist's friendliness to Israel is not real, however. Matarasso sees in Ezekiel 38 and 39 an attack by a foreign nation against Israel – he believes it to be Russia, but this may not be the case. The Russian armies will penetrate deep into Israel, rolling up the country like a carpet before them. However, rebellion breaks out in the Soviet forces (Ezekiel 38:18-22) and a series of disasters overtakes the Russians on the mountains of Israel, the Russian armed forces being decimated (Matarasso, n.d., 11.3). The Antichrist continues to use Israel in order to gain further nations. After this, Israel and the Jews will have served their purpose and the Antichrist breaks his agreement with the Jews (Daniel 9:27), seizes the rebuilt Temple and begins a massive persecution against all God-fearers left on earth, primarily the Jews (Matarasso, n.d., 11.3).

Calamities occur as the Tribulation draws to a close. The final battle at Megiddo begins as a confrontation between East and West, but then the heavens split asunder and Jesus descends from the sky, backed by the armed might of heaven (Matthew 24:30; Revelation 19:11-16). The battle will hardly be a battle and the Antichrist and False Prophet are cast away.

Israel will be saved (Romans 10:26). The eyes of the Jews will be opened at last - they will "look on him whom they pierced" (Zechariah 12:10-11), and they will mourn. Jesus will be owned at last as the Messiah, Saviour and Lord. Truly Israel will be a nation "born in a day" (Isaiah 66:7-9).

Conclusion

Bauckham (1980, p. 472) writes,

Bauckham It is important to notice that N[ew] T[estament] eschatology is never mere information about the future. The future hope is always relevant to Christian life in the present. It is therefore repeatedly made the basis of exhortations to Christian living appropriate to the Christian hope (Mt. 5:3-10, 24f.; Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Cor. 7:26-31; 15:58; 1 Thes. 5:1-11; Heb. 10:32-39; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; 2 Pet. 3:14; Rev. 2f.). Christian life is characterised by its orientation towards the time when God's rule will finally prevail universally (Mt. 6:10), and Christians will therefore stand for that reality against all the apparent dominance of evil in this age.

As the Church's future, the coming of Christ must inspire the Church's present, however near or distant in time it may be. The forces of evil will, although increasing and receiving eventual personification, be defeated. Furthermore, God will again turn His hand to His ancient peoples, and all Israel will be saved (Romans 10:26) along with the Church.

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