

## ***Revelation: Hermeneutics***

### ***Hermeneutical Principles***

- The difficulties that lie in applying Revelation to a modern audience are very similar to those of the OT Prophets
  - As in all genres of Scripture, God's word to us is found primarily in God's word to the original audience
  - But in contrast to the other genres, the Prophets & Revelation often speak of things that (in their case) were future events
- Often the 'future' orientated events had a temporal immediacy to it
  - Which from our historical vantage point have now already taken place
    - Ex.) Rome *did* come under temporal judgment, partly through the barbarian hordes, as John saw

### ***Clear Hermeneutics***

- For such events, the hermeneutical problems are not too great
- We can still hear God's word for the reasons for the judgments
  - As we may properly assume that God will always pour out judgment on those nations who have murdered Christians, just as it was with Rome
- Likewise, we *must* hear as God's word for us that discipleship goes the way of the Cross
  - God has not promised us freedom *from* suffering and death
    - But rather triumph *through* it
- Thus, Revelation is God's word of comfort and encouragement to Christians who suffer
  - Especially at the hands of the state because they are Christians
  - Because God is in control
  - And the Lamb has triumphed over the dragon
- To miss this, is to miss the message of book altogether

### ***Hermeneutical Difficulties***

- The difficulty with application in Revelation lies in the fact that the 'temporal' word is often so closely tied to the final eschatological realities
  - Ex.) The fall of Rome in ch. 18 seems to appear as the first chapter in the final wrap-up
  - And many of the pictures of 'temporal' judgment are interlaced with words or ideas that also imply the final end as part of the picture
- There are 5 suggestions to deal with these difficulties:
  1. We need to learn that pictures of the future express a reality, but are not themselves necessarily to be confused with reality itself
    - Nor are the details of every picture meant to be 'fulfilled' in some specific way
      - Ex.) The 1<sup>st</sup> four trumpets echoing the Plagues of Egypt
  2. Some of the pictures that were intended primarily to express the certainty of God's judgment must not also be interpreted to mean 'soon-ness', at least from a limited perspective
    - Ex.) When Satan is defeated at Christ's death & resurrection and is hurled to earth to wreak havoc on the church, he knows his time is 'short'
      - But 'short' does not necessarily mean 'very soon', but rather 'limited'

- Thus, it did not need to happen in John's lifetime
- 3. The pictures where the 'temporal' is closely tied to the 'eschatological' should not be viewed as simultaneous
  - Even if the original readers themselves may have understood them this way
    - Just like 'double view' in the Prophets
  - The eschatological dimension of the judgments and of the salvation should alert us to the *possibility* of a 'not yet' dimension to many of the pictures
  - On the other hand, there seem to be no fixed rules as to how we are to extract or understand that still (for us) future element
    - What we must be careful NOT to do is to spend too much time speculating as to how any of our own contemporary events may be fitted into the pictures of Revelation
  - It is NOT intended to give is literal details of the conclusion of history
- 4. Although there are probably many instances where there is a second, yet-to-be-fulfilled dimension to the pictures, we have been given no keys as to how we are to pin these down
  - In this regard the New Testament itself is a bit ambiguous
  - Ex.) The antichrist figure
    - In 2 Thess. 2:3-4, he is a definitive figure
    - In Rev. 13-14, he comes in the form of the Roman Empire
    - In both cases, his appearance appears to be eschatological
    - But, in 1 John 2:20-23, this is reinterpreted to refer to false prophets who had invaded the church
    - How do we understand this?
      - The church has properly understood a variety of world rulers as expressions of antichrist
        - E.g. Nero, Hitler, Stalin, Idi Amin (Uganda), etc.
        - Thus, many antichrists continue to come (1 John 2:18)
      - But what about a specific worldwide figure who will accompany the final events of the end?
        - Not necessarily, but maybe
          - The NT is ambiguous and should lead to some caution in being dogmatic about any such view
- 5. The pictures that were intended to be totally eschatological are still to be taken so
  - Ex.) 11:15-19 & 19:1-22:21 are entirely eschatological in their presentation

### ***A Final Word on the Final Word***

- Revelation closes much like how Genesis opens
  - Focused on God *in* His Creation
- As much ambiguity as there is in Revelation, this vision is absolutely certain
  - And is central both the warning and encouragement of Revelation
- Until Christ comes, we live out the future in the already
  - By hearing and obeying His word
- But the day is coming when the 'not yet' will be here
  - And we need to live now, with that in mind