

# Revelation – Session 2

Apocalyptic language and Imagery

# 3 Important Words

- Providence
- Eschatology
- Apocalyptic

# Biblical Apocalyptic Thought

- OT histories and law: include an expectation of God's renewal
- Psalms: include poetic description of God's age of salvation
- Prophets contain most well developed images (judgment and salvation – think Amos and Isaiah)
- Gospels: synoptics - Jesus' teaching on End Times and in John - Jesus' purpose as light in darkness

# A Dense Definition

- Apocalypse is 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 (envisioning salvation) and spatial (involving another supernatural world).

# New Times & New Way of Thinking

- Heightened fragility and changeability in world (politically, socially, science/orderliness of world.
- From Daniel (165 BCE) through Qumran Literature (second BCE to first century CE)...lots and lots of apocalyptic literature produced.
- Revelation is not “unique” it is part of stream of literary attempts to make sense of a crazy world.

# Getting the Question Right

- Not: “Will there be an end to the world?”
- But: “Is God Faithful?”
- Or better put: “In an impossible situation how can one still believe in the faithfulness of God?”
- The apocalyptists’ answer was to affirm the faithfulness of God despite the evil of the world.

# Revelation: Problem & Response

- Problem: people are experiencing suffering not because of their failings/idolatry & rebellion, but rather because of the **faithfulness!**
- Response: regardless of how powerful the evil of the world seems, God is still in charge.
- Moreover: change/restoration/salvation comes from above!

# Revelation's Affirmation

- Revelation affirms God's goodness, *nevertheless!*
- Even where the *therefore* makes no sense.



# But why is Revelation so difficult???

- Well, it doesn't necessarily have to be difficult; there are many ways to read scripture...
- Devotional - what is God's word to me today?
- Inspirational – what does God want from me?
- Informational – how has God acted in the past?
- Historical – what was the original context?

# Types of Interpretation

- **Non-historical** – poetic, spiritual; timeless truths re: struggle of Good vs. Evil.
- **Church-historical** – prophecy as prediction...applicable to current time.
- **End-Historical** – Futurist/dispensationalist and pre-millennialist...prophecy as prediction and audience is “living just before the end.”
- **Contemporary-historical**: takes seriously the context in deriving meaning from the text. (KEH)

# But why is it so difficult?!

- Because we humans use two different sorts of languages: Propositional and Pictorial
- Want to learn more!

# Propositional Language

- Objectifying : what is real is out there and can be identified/referenced
- Symbols are merely signs pointing to something specific
- Logic is primary; truth is known by consistency
- Everything moves in a straightforward order
- ***This is not the type of language in Revelation***

# Pictorial Language

- Non-objectifying: since we cannot grasp ultimate reality as it is....words ***point*** toward...
- More like Psalms than systematic theology
- Attempts to share things indescribable
- Symbols are more like webs of meaning (cannot really be “de-coded”)
- Uses myths to convey truth

## Sentence #2

- Like the Bible in general, there is some difficulty in understanding Revelation, but it can and should be understood for it has had enormous influence in religion, history and culture and has an urgently needed message for the contemporary church (THAT'S US!).