

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

by Rev. William Macleod

STUDY GUIDE

Module 7:
**ESCHATOLOGY—
THE DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS**

Lecture 4:
**INTERPRETING THE
BOOK OF REVELATION**



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

John Knox Institute of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

© 2021 by John Knox Institute of Higher Education

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means for profit, except in brief quotations for the purposes of review, comment, or scholarship, without written permission from the publisher, John Knox Institute, P.O. Box 19398, Kalamazoo, MI 49019-19398, USA.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Authorized King James Version.

Visit our website: www.johnknoxinstitute.org

Rev. William Macleod, recently retired minister in the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), serving 45 years at Knightswood Free Church, in Glasgow, Scotland. In addition, he was for many years the editor of the denominational magazine, *The Free Church Witness*, and was Professor of Systematic Theology and Principal of the Free Church (Continuing) Seminary, in Inverness, Scotland.

www.freechurchcontinuing.org

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Rev. William Macleod

STUDY GUIDE

Module 7

Eschatology—the Doctrine of Last Things

1. Introduction to Eschatology
2. The Doctrine of Death
3. Events Leading to the Second Coming
- 4. Interpreting the Book of Revelation**
5. The Jews
6. Dispensational Premillenarianism
7. The Second Coming and the Resurrection
8. The Doctrine of the Judgment
9. The Doctrine of Hell
10. The Doctrine of Heaven

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Rev. William Macleod

STUDY GUIDE

Module 7:

Eschatology—The Doctrine of Last Things

Lecture 4:

Interpreting the Book of Revelation

Introduction

The Book of Revelation has proved mysterious to many. It's language and imagery are graphic. It's quite different from other books of the New Testament, but there are similar parts of the Old Testament where we find this apocalyptic language—for example, in sections of Ezekiel and of Daniel. Some theologians and commentators avoid Revelation because of the special difficulty of interpreting its imagery. Calvin, for example, provided no commentary on it. However, it's in the Scriptures, so it's there for a purpose. And indeed, when properly approached, it can provide us with great encouragement. It's there for our benefit, and particularly to encourage us in difficulties, and in times of persecution.

Theme: *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*

I. Four Different Approaches to Interpreting Revelation

1. The Preterist view.
 - a. Everything prophesied in the book already happened by the first century.
 - b. Emphasis on the destruction of Jerusalem AD 70.
 - c. Focused primarily on the evil of the Roman Empire.
 - d. Favored by liberal theologians.
 - e. Some truth, but ignores Revelation 1:1, “things which must come to pass.”
2. The Historicist view.
 - a. A panoramic view of history from the first century to the second coming.
 - b. A common view in the church through the centuries.
 - c. Held to by some of the Reformers, but with different interpretations.
 - d. But it only treats European history and ignores the rest of the world.

- e. There is some truth in it about prophesying the future.
3. The Futurist view.
 - a. From chapter 4 onward refers to the end of the world.
 - b. Concerned only with future events surrounding Christ's return.
 - c. Emphasis on the second coming.
 - d. Completely detaches from the present and the past.
 4. The Idealist or Poetic view.
 - a. Emphasis on encouraging persecuted Christians from first century onward.
 - b. Describes the triumph of God and the victory of Christ and his kingdom.
 - c. Says the language should not be taken literally, but poetically.
 - d. Some truth, but ignores Rev. 1:1 "things which must come to pass."

Questions:

1. What are the main things about the Preterist view? What are some truths in this approach? What is the problem with the Preterist view?

2. Explain the Historicist view of Revelation. How popular has this view been? What does it emphasize? But what is the main problem with this view?

3. What is the Futurist view of Revelation? Describe its good point and its problem.

4. Explain the Idealist or Poetic view of Revelation? What's the problem with this view?

II. The Best Approach to Interpreting Revelation

1. William Hendriksen's commentary, *More than Conquerors* helps greatly.
 - a. He partially follows some of the four views.
 - b. But he divides the book into seven sections.
 - c. These seven sections are parallel, not chronological.
 - c. Rev. Macleod follows him, but not fully.

Questions

1. What are the main views of William Hendriksen. How does he agree with some of the four views? How does he divide the book into sections?

III. The Structure of Revelation—Seven Sections

1. Section 1: chapters 1 to 3 describes Christ as Head of the church.
2. Section 2: chapters 4 to 7, the book with the seven seals and the tribulation of the church.
 - a. A vision into heaven, and the scroll is given containing the purposes of God for the world and the church.
 - b. None is worthy to open the book.
 - c. The Lion of the tribe of Judah—Christ—takes the book and breaks the first seal.
 - d. “These are they which came out of the great tribulation...”
 - d. This section ends with the church of God saved and at rest and in peace in heaven.
3. Section 3: chapters 8 to 11, describes the seven trumpets of judgment.
 - a. God's plagues in answer to prayers of the suffering church.
 - b. Christ is ruling, restraining, and conquering his enemies.
 - c. The final judgment, Revelation 11:18.
4. Section 4: chapters 12 to 14, Christ and his church persecuted by Satan and his allies.
 - a. The woman is the church; the man child is Christ born; the dragon is Satan.
 - b. Christ ascends to heaven, and Satan wars with the church on earth.
 - c. The Reformed say the beast is antichrist, differing from Hendriksen, who says the beast is the Roman Empire.
 - d. The beast out of the sea, is of the nations, the Roman Catholic Empire.
 - e. The beast from the earth is the Papacy of Roman Catholic Church.

- f. Babylon is the church of antichrist, Roman Catholic Church.
5. Section 5: chapters 15 and 16, the seven vials of wrath are poured out on the followers of the dragon and the beasts.
- a. All who reject the light of the gospel will perish.
 - b. Nations gather against the true church to destroy it at Armageddon.
 - c. Christ returns to deliver his people in the final judgment.
 - d. Cities of the nations fell.
6. Section 6: chapters 17 to 19 describes the fall of Babylon and the beasts.
- a. Per Reformed doctrine, Babylon the Great is the Roman Catholic antichrist.
 - b. The ten horns are ten kings who reign with the beast.
 - c. Christ appears from heaven with armies of heaven to rescue the church.
 - d. The beast and the false prophet and followers are cast into the lake of fire.
7. Section 7: chapters 20 to 22, deals with Satan being restrained.
- a. Locking up of Satan in the bottomless pit.
 - b. The judgment of Satan and all mankind.
 - c. The appearance of the New Jerusalem and the new heavens and new earth.

Questions:

1. What are the main messages of the first section, chapters 1 to 3 of Revelation? How does this speak to the church today?

2. Which vision do we see in the beginning of the second section, chapters 4 to 7?

3. What is the main theme of section 2? Who is it that is worthy to open the seals? How does this section end?

4. How is section 3 parallel to section 2? How is it God's answer to the persecutions in section 2?

5. In section 4, what is symbolized by: the woman; the man child; the beasts; and Babylon?

6. How is the pouring out of the seven vials in section 5 parallel to the trumpets of judgment in section 3, and the opening of the seven seals in section 2? What's the main message in section 5?

7. What is symbolized by the great Harlot in section 6? What is the theme of this section?

8. What are the main themes of section 7?

IV. Revelation 20:20–22, Views of the Millennium Church

1. Premillennialism: Christ will one day return to reign on earth as King in Jerusalem for a thousand years, bringing in the millennium, and after the thousand years then the end comes.
 - a. This view was common in the early church, called Chiliasm.
 - b. It was revived by the Anabaptists during the Reformation.

- c. It became popular again in the nineteenth century.
- d. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, Andrew and Horatius Bonar, C. H. Spurgeon.
- e. The view of Dispensationalists during the twentieth century.
 - 1) Popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible.
- 2. Postmillennialism says there will be a prolonged period of blessing and great spiritual prosperity for the church.
 - a. Satan will be bound spiritually, allowing the church to prosper around the world.
 - b. After that long period of blessing, there will be a falling away spiritually with fierce persecution of the church.
 - c. Then Christ will return after the millennium, and rescue the church.
 - d. Satan and his followers will be cast into the lake of fire.
 - e. This was a common view among the English and Dutch Puritans, early Scottish and American theologians; Jonathan Edwards, the Hodges, the Alexanders, B. B. Warfield, and many other classical Reformed theologians.
 - f. Tends to be very optimistic.
- 3. Amillennialism says the whole New Testament age is the millennium, that there is no specific millennium period to come.
 - a. This is the most common view held today by Reformed theologians.
 - 1) Promoted by Dutch and Dutch American theologians of twentieth century.
 - 2) Herman Bavinck, Louis Berkof, William Hendriksen.
 - b. Tends to be pessimistic, expecting things to get worse and worse until Christ returns.
 - c. Influenced by the higher criticism movement of the nineteenth century, by evolution, and rationalism, further by two world wars in the twentieth century.
- 4. Looking at Revelation chapter 20.
 - a. Amillennialism says Satan was bound by Christ's work on the cross.
 - 1) But Peter warns that the devil is seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).
 - 2) Jesus warns if it were possible the elect would be deceived (Matthew 24:24).
 - 3) Paul warns of the fiery darts of the wicked one (Ephesians 6:16).
 - 4) We see many are deceived by the devil today.
 - 5) If Satan is loosed before the end, it is undoing Christ's victory on the cross.
 - b. Postmillennialism sees the millennium in the future, very positive.
 - 1) Heaven will intervene and Satan will be greatly restrained and restricted.
 - 2) False religions will largely disappear.
 - 3) Liberal theology and evolution will be rejected.

- 4) Christ is enthroned in heaven. Now his enemies will be his footstool.
 - 5) The gospel will be preached with power, most people will be saved.
 - 6) The martyrs who died for the cause of Christ will reign with him.
 - 7) There will be a spiritual resurrection for the church.
 - 8) At the end, Satan will be loosed, deceive the nations again, stir up persecution.
 - 9) When the church is about to be destroyed, Christ will return and destroy his enemies, and cast Satan and his followers into the lake of fire.
 - 10) The great white throne will be set up and the final judgment will occur.
5. We must not be dogmatic when striving to interpret prophecy.

Questions:

1. What is the view of Premillennialism? How do we see this throughout in church history?

2. What is the Postmillennial view of eschatology? Who held this view in church history?

3. What does Amillennialism teach about the end times? How did this view spread in the church?

4. How does Revelation chapter 20 make us question the views of Amillennialism?

5. What is the classical Protestant Reformed understanding of the millennium in light of the binding of Satan in Revelation chapter 20?

6. What is a most important thing to remember when interpreting prophecy?

V. Self-Reflection

As Rev. Macleod said in his introduction, because the Book of Revelation is in the Bible, it is there for a purpose, and indeed, when properly approached, it can provide us with great encouragement. It is there for our benefit, and particularly to encourage us in difficulties, in times of persecution. Are you more familiar with this book after studying this lecture? Please spend more time reading and meditating on the Revelation of Jesus Christ in light of this lecture, asking the blessing of the Holy Spirit as you do.