

Understanding the Book of Revelation

"Revelation is a unique, finely blended combination of three distinct literary types: apocalypse, prophecy, and letter.

Furthermore, the basic type — apocalypse — is a literary form that does not exist in our own day."

Fee & Stuart

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Of all the books in the entire Bible, our interpretations of Revelation ought to be the one that we hold the most open-handedly.

Elements of apocalyptic literature:

- Deeply connected to Old Testament prophetic literature. Thus, apocalyptic literature looks forward toward God's triumph over evil. At least 250 Old Testament references.
- Cryptic, enigmatic, and symbolic.
- Non-real/fantasy images rather than metaphors rooted in real life.
- Stylized. Symbolic divisions of time, use of numbers.



Apocalyptic writers didn't view themselves as future-predictors, but rather as truth revealers.

But Revelation is also a prophetic book in that it was pointing to the ultimate triumph of the Lamb over evil.

Lastly, it is a letter/epistle. John is writing to real churches full of people he knows and loves, telling them to persevere and hope in the face of persecution.

The blending of three genres into one work like this makes understanding more difficult.

Thus, regardless of what hermeneutic methodology we apply to the book, an appropriate interpretation of the book is that we should:

- A** Be prepared for the reality that God's people are not shielded from persecution and suffering, quite the opposite.
- B** Have confidence that God is sovereign over creation and history.
- C** Be secure in the knowledge that God will judge systems and people who harm his Church.
- D** Know that discipleship is costly, but the reward is worth it.
- E** Be comforted by the knowledge that the Lamb wins.

What is your one takeaway from this session?

