



Northside Proclaimer

Proclaiming The Word Of The Lord

1 Thessalonians 1:8

Northside Church Of Christ Welcomes You!

December 7, 2014

“The Folly Of Talking Figurative Passages Literal”

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One of the most talked about subjects in the religious world today is the end times. We’ve been in a study of Premillennialism. Last week we studied the word "antichrist." This week, in conjunction with that, we want to examine symbolism in Scripture. If you haven’t read the previous articles, you’re encouraged to do so.

God told Moses, “... ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel. You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself’” (Exodus 19.1-4, emphasis mine).

Obviously, God didn’t literally bear the Israelites on eagles’ wings! Instead, God used Moses to deliver the people from Pharaoh and protected them until they were completely free of the Egyptians. The swift deliverance of God’s people is likened to the bearing on eagles’ wings. Clearly we can see figurative language being used by God.

A more specific type of figurative language, called apocalyptic language, is found in Psalm 46.6 where the Psalmist wrote, “[God] utters his voice, the earth melts.” The earth did not literally melt when God spoke. Therefore, there is much folly to taking figurative language literally in the Bible.

Another example of this is found in Isaiah 34.4-7 where God describes the destruction of the nation of Edom. Notice, “[a]ll the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree... Their land shall drink its fill of blood, and their soil shall be gorged with fat.” God was going to bring judgment upon this wicked nation. He did it literally, but described it figuratively!

In agreement with apocalyptic language, the word revelation is defined in Greek as, apokalypsis, that is, lit., "an uncovering, unveiling" (Vine's Expository Dictionary). John wrote, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John” (Rev. 1.1 NKJV). The word signified means, “to give a sign, to signify, indicate to make known” (Thayer and Smith. "Greek Lexicon entry for Semaino"). Therefore, God’s revelation, i.e. uncovering was signified, i.e. made known, by His angels. *Continued on back...*

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Announcements

- Remember John Blair
- Remember the shut in's.
- Pray for the church and one another.
- Men's Bible today, Dec. 21st 3:30 PM
- Teen's Bible study / Kid's drill today
- Call or email me to add announcements, thanks.
- Bible study this Tuesday 7 PM canceled
- Coming soon: Young family / couples' Bible study (1st of year)
- Remember the spiritual sick among us

It should be noted however, that this uncovering was not to be made with explicit statements per se, but to be made known by signs and symbols as the Greek and context defines. Premillennialists deny this simple truth.

As Bible students, we should never read into the text something that is simply not there. One way to accomplish this is to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. Frankly, I'm tired of hearing people say to me, "that's just your interpretation." May it never be! Do we really believe God would give us a book to read and live by and not give us instructions on how to interpret His Word? Though this is a topic for another time, this truth can be seen in chapter one of Revelation.

In his vision, the apostle John saw two symbols, "seven golden lampstands" (v12) and "seven stars" (v16). Allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, John wrote, "[a]s for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches" (v20). We now know the meaning of the golden lampstands and seven stars. Clearly we can see this to be symbolism.

Concerning the events in this book, four times God said they were "things that must soon take place" (1.1). In fact, John declared, "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, **for the time is near**" (1.3, emphasis mine). Further, the angels were to show John "what must soon take place" (22.6) and God told John, "[d]o not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, **for the time is near**" (22.10, emphasis mine). John wrote these things in the opening and closing of his book.

Another point that must be developed to understand the context of Revelation is to recognize John's intended audience. The book reveals that John wrote to the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 1.4). Therefore, he did not write to us initially, and more importantly, the things written were to take place in the lifetime of its first readers.

Now, concerning the antichrist as we discussed last week, if these things were soon to follow the writing of the book and if the things written were written in signs and symbols and if the antichrist is already here and if the antichrist is defined per Scripture as one who opposes Christ (all points we've proven to be true), it is unnecessary to apply the antichrist to anything written in the book of Revelation!

Let's remember as we move forward in our study that there is much symbolism in the book of Revelation. We must not make a figurative passage literal *if it contradicts another passage elsewhere*. Further, we must remember that the book of Revelation was **soon to be fulfilled after its writing**. Therefore, symbol or not, those things written were not written to us to be fulfilled now or even in the future, but rather written to its intended audience to be fulfilled then. You would think that this would settle the matter. Yet, Premillennialists still try to find a literal fulfillment of the symbols in the 21st century. You can't have what God has already fulfilled. BG