

Johannine Studies

Lecture 13 Study Notes – April 29, 2008

1. History of Millennium after the Reformation- The early 1500's were times of religious and social unrest (prime ingredients for apocalyptic revival). In 1517, Martin Luther affixed his 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg's castle church. Three years later, he was excommunicated. In 1519, Ulrich Zwingli brought about Protestantism in Switzerland. The French-born John Calvin broke with Rome in 1533 and led the Protestant reformation in Geneva. In Geneva, he and other Protestant leaders exercised church and civil power, imposing orthodoxy, suppressing dissent, and enforced a moral code of behavior based on the Old Testament law (they created a theocracy). Calvin's writings and doctrine, which emphasized both God's mercy and absolute power and man's helplessness, shaped the thinking of the Protestant Reformation for centuries to come.
2. The social unrest of the day was represented by the so called "Peasant War" in which perhaps 300,000 ill-equipped rebels pillaged castles and monasteries demanding the end of serfdom, feudal fees, restoration of common lands, and hunting and fishing rights, along with the right to choose their clergy. A major figure in all of this was a Protestant Pastor by the name of Thomas Muntzer. He was completely absorbed in apocalyptic speculation, which by the early 1520 had become an obsession in the religious and even political thinking of the day. According to Boyer, Muntzer became the Peasant War's principle theological defender and spurred the rebels of his region to new heights of violence. In one battle near Frankenhausen, he fired up the rebels with his speech of apocalyptic delusions and the result was 5,000 peasants slaughtered, and Muntzer himself beheaded.
3. Another group that rose to prominence was the Anabaptist. This group rejected Luther's alliance with the powers-to-be of Germany and Calvin's theocracy in Geneva. They stressed rebaptism of adult believers, personal piety, nonresistance, and separation from the world. Apocalyptic hope burned brightly among this group. According to one historian, "All Anabaptists were united in their conviction that the return of Christ was near" and that "Christ and Antichrist were locked in the final struggle." Many believed that the New Jerusalem would arise from around them; no doubt coming in their lifetime.
4. The result of all this led Reformation leaders to react in horror. Luther dismissed Revelation to be "neither apostolic nor prophetic" and relegated it to an appendix in his German New Testament (page 61, Boyer). Zwingli dismissed Revelation as "not a book of the Bible." Calvin accepted it as cannon, but not like the Gospels, and did not include it in his Bible commentaries. Yet Luther and Calvin both named the Pope the antichrist. Is the Pope being associated with the antichrist still heard of today? The Catholics turned the tide on the Protestants and named Luther as the antichrist, as well.
5. In England during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), pamphleteers proclaimed their nation's duty to help preserve Protestantism against the assaults of Antichrist, embodied by the papacy. With the rise of Ottoman Empire and Islam in general, Mohammed was identified as the Antichrist. (Note: modern treatment of Revelation next week)
6. **Amillennialism**
 - a. Amills are often difficult to distinguish between Postmills. For example, Augustine (354-430) and John Calvin (1509-1564) have been claimed by both groups. As we go, we will try to compare and contrast Amills and Postmills.
 - b. The second coming of Christ will be followed immediately by that general resurrection, the judgment of all men, and consignment of all to their ultimate state. There will be no earthly personal reign of Christ and no millennium in which Christ is present (both Amills and Postmills agree).

- c. The two resurrections of Revelation 20 do not require an intervening millennium.
- d. Amills believe that the two resurrections are not both physical. Some Amills say the first is spiritual and the second is physical, others regard both resurrections as spiritual.
- e. The purpose of the book is to assure God's people that Christ will triumph over all opposition. Satan was attempting to deceive believers into worshiping the emperor rather than Christ. The binding of Satan (20:1-3) is to incapacitate him for effectively continuing this work. The one thousand years symbolizes the completeness of this binding and restraint. Therefore, the millennium is symbolic rather than literal.
- f. The symbol of the one thousand years is used to convey the idea of the complete triumph of the martyrs who have been objects of Satan's wrath. In Revelation 6: 9-11, they are questioning how long before God halts the success of the wicked one. In Revelation 20, they are resurrected in the first resurrection and sitting on the thrones reigning with Christ for a thousand years.
- g. Even Old Testament prophecies are less literal than most Premills consider them.
- h. Amills and Premills do share some similarities. For example, Postmills are optimistic about the future salvation of the world, the Amills and Premills are not. Some Amills might believe that there is going to be more success than the Premills believe but, as a rule, they doubt that evangelization will be as successful as the Postmills.
- i. Amills believe that Jesus could virtually return at any time, while Postmills don't believe that He will return until the Gospel has been spread worldwide with a general acceptance of Him. Both Amills and Premills believe that there are no major events of long duration yet to be fulfilled; the Lord could come at any time (*A Basic Guide to Eschatology: Making Sense of the Millennium* by Millard J. Erickson, page 75).
- j. According to Erickson, even though these two (Amills and Premills) might agree on the imminent return of Christ, the Amill is seldom upset at the deterioration of the world. He is less preoccupied with details and sequences of last things and even less curious about the "signs of the times" (page 75). Why would you think Amills might be less upset about the situation that the world was in?
- k. Question to ponder: Do Amills believe in a bodily resurrection at all?
- l. The Amills generally see Revelation as composed of several sections (seven), each of which recapitulates the events of the same period rather than describing the event of successive periods. Each deals with the same era—the period between Christ's first and second comings—picking up earlier themes, elaborating and developing them further.

7. **Pros of Amill thought**

- a. Recognizes the Bible prophecy and eschatology has a great deal of symbolism and handles it accordingly.
- b. Amill have attempted to do serious exegesis of relevant Biblical passages, such as Revelation 20.

8. **Cons of Amill thought**

- a. In chapter 20, there is no apparent contextual basis for discriminating between the two verbs "life."
- b. How do we decide what is literal or symbolic? Not just an Amill problem but a difficulty in general for all the readings of John's Apocalypse.

9. **Premillennialism**

- a. Earthly reign of Christ is established by the Second Coming, this reign is actual and a bodily return of Christ. Why a literal reign of Christ on the earth? During Jesus' life on the earth, Christ experienced a state of humiliation in progressive stages. George Ladd believes that it is necessary for the manifestation of Christ's glory and sovereignty to take place upon the earth. Ladd discerns three stages in Christ's triumph over death as described in 1 Corinthians 15: 23-26: The resurrection, the second coming, and the end. The interval between the resurrection and the parousia is the church age; the interval between the parousia and the telos—without which the two might as well be

collapsed into one—is the millennium. In addition, according to the dispensational Premills, there is yet another argument for the millennium: the large number of prophecies yet to be unfulfilled.

- b. During this period, Christ will be in complete control, similar to what Paul says in Phil 2: 10-11.
- c. It will be a period of righteous rule. The standard of living that is described on the Sermon of the Mount will be the rule of this time period. There will be world-wide peace. There will be harmony in creation (Romans 8: 22-23). The saint will reign with Christ.
- d. This reign will not be a gradual and progressive coming of the thousand year reign but it will come dramatically and cataclysmically, inaugurated by the Second Coming.
- e. Premills, apply Matthew 24:12 to the world's spiritual and social conditions with men's faith and the world's conditions growing steadily worse.
- f. Premills believe that a "great tribulation" will immediately precede the millennium. It will involve cosmic phenomena, persecution, and great suffering.
- g. Premills differ as to whether the church will be present on earth during the tribulation or whether God will remove it from the earth just prior to the great tribulation (Pretribs and Posttribs).
- h. Christ's coming will bring Satan and his helpers under control, binding Satan and them for 1000 years. Near the end Satan will be unbounded briefly and launch one desperate, final struggle. Then he and his demons will be cast into the Lake of Fire.
- i. The two resurrections of Revelation 20 are to be distinguished on the basis of their participants, not on the basis of their natures. Both resurrections, not just the second as Amills believe, are literal and bodily. In all of Revelation, not just the 20th chapter, the Premills will adopt a relatively literalistic interpretation of the Bible and the Apocalypse. This means that the words are to be taken literally whenever this does not lead to absurdity. Furthermore, the Premills have a strong tendency toward a futurist interpretation of Revelation, rather than an historical or preterist interpretation. The difference being the preterist believe the events have already occurred shortly after the book was written, while the historical interpretation regards these events as having been future when the book was written but occurring throughout the history of the church. Historical Premills combine the futurist and preterist views, holding that the book had a message for John's own age, and consummation of redemptive history (the future).
- j. Only believers are involved in the first resurrection, however, whereas the rest of the human race, the non-Christians, are not resurrected until the end of the millennium. All believers will reign with Christ, not just the martyrs, while the resurrection of unbelievers serves only to get them to the judgment.