

Introduction

- Idealism sees most of Revelation as being fulfilled spiritually in every age.
- It does not see Revelation as something that is tied to history or that will be fulfilled literally and physically.
- The emphasis is on the spiritual meaning and principle behind the text.
- This is largely because the genre and symbols used are so extreme and bizarre.
- I will use the terms idealism, spiritual, symbolic interchangeably.

How We All do This

- Everyone, aside from weird extremists, recognizes the Bible is not always literal.
- "Take up your cross and follow me" Luke 9:23
- Joel does not mean the enemy army will march perfectly in step.
- The promised land did not literally have flowing honey and milk.
- "Baptism now saves you" 1 Peter 3:21
- The challenge is understanding when this is and is not applicable.

Historical Trend

- It began in the 3rd century as a futuristic interpretation of Revelation was rejected.
- The shift continued towards a spiritual interpretation of all the Scriptures was emphasized over the literal sense.
- Idealism is one of the major views of Revelation today even if the interpretive scheme has been rejected.
- It has been held by the majority of the universal church for the longest time.
- This would still be the primary view of Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans, Reformed Baptists, and usually those who hold to covenant theology.

Various Interpretations of Revelation

- Revelation is the story of what Jesus is currently doing in the world.
- Revelation is the story of how Christians must resist the temptation of the empire.
- The anti-Christ, beast, prophet, are not singular figures but repeated opposition.
- Satan is currently being restrained by the church and unable to deceive the nations.
- The two witnesses are not individuals but the church who are protected from the world and able to pronounce judgment on sin.
- Christ will physically return at the conclusion of the symbolic reign of the church.

Arguments in Favor

- Revelation has the same meaning and application throughout each age.
- It has the most historical backing, even though it is not the oldest.
- It helps explain away difficult to understand literal passages.
- It gives a good answer for why sinful people are alive in the millennium of Christ.

Problems

- The application and meaning of passages in the Bible has changed repeatedly throughout time.
- The Old Testament means something different to Christians that it did not mean to the original recipients.
- Spiritual interpretation must be grounded on a literal meaning.
- The prophets, and Daniel, use symbolic language to describe literal future realities.
- An idealist interpretation does not need to exclude a literal interpretation.

Revelation 20

- Thousand years has been symbolic in Scripture before (Josh 23:10; Deut. 7:9; Ps 84:10; 2 Pet 3:8).
- This would simply refer to Satan being bound at the cross and resurrection of Christ.
- It sees the two resurrections as being different in kind, with an emphasis on "first" and "second."
- Historic idealism interpreted the first resurrection as spiritual and the second one as physical.
- Today, idealism typically translates the first resurrection as a resurrection of the righteous to the "intermediate state (meaning heaven)." Therefore, the resurrection is actually a physical death.
- The second resurrection is a physical resurrection of the wicked to the second death.
- Resurrection not only changes meanings but now means death instead of life.
- "The rest of" always refers to something in the same category. The "rest of the dead" must be the same kind of dead as in verse 4.
- It linguistically must mean the same kind of dead and same kind of resurrection.
- The rest of the dead, righteous and saints, are resurrected for judgment in verse 12.

Application

- I held to an idealistic interpretation until convinced by Revelation 20.
- I think a spiritual interpretation is needed but it is not exclusive.
- We should learn from the practical application of an idealist view.