

Towards a Biblical Hermeneutic



Overview

- Pre-mil, a-mil, post-mil, and hermeneutics
- Biblical motivation for sanctification
- Hermeneutics in the Bible
- Hermeneutics in early Church history
- What can we conclude from this?

Introduction

Pre-millennialism - there is a literal, physical, earthwide kingdom that the Lord will establish at the end of the Tribulation for 1,000 years, and after that, the Great Judgment and Eternal State.

A-millennialism - there will be no literal, physical, 1,000 year reign of Christ, and that the Millennial Kingdom exists now, in a spiritual sense.

Post-millennialism - we exist in a post-millennial state in which the Millennial Kingdom has already occurred.

Hermeneutics – the interpretive rules
applied...in order to find the meaning...in the
text

Literal Hermeneutic – seeks to employ a literal, plain sense reading that takes into account the grammar, historical context, and literary style of a passage in order to determine the author's original intent and meaning

Allegorical Hermeneutic – applies metaphor, imagery, symbols, etc. to passages in Scripture in order to determine a hidden spiritual meaning

Pre-millennialism applies a consistent, literal hermeneutic to all things in Scripture, including eschatology

A-millennialism and post-millennialism do not apply a consistent, literal hermeneutic to eschatology

“If all prophecy must be interpreted in a literal way, the [Futuristic Premillennial] views are correct; but if it can be proved that these prophecies have a spiritual meaning, then [Futuristic Premillennialism] must be rejected.”

- William Masselink (a-millennial)

“It is generally agreed that if the prophecies are taken literally, they do foretell a restoration of the nation of Israel in the land of Palestine with the Jews having a prominent place in that kingdom and ruling over the other nations.”

- Lorraine Boettner (post-millennial)

“...we know that whenever the Prophets set forth promises of a happy and prosperous state to God’s people, they adopt metaphorical expressions...for they accommodated their style, as we have already stated, to the capacities of a rude and weak people.”

- John Calvin (a-millennial)

“...if you interpret prophetic truth in the same normal, natural way you interpret all the rest of the passages of Scripture, you’re going to end up a premillennialist; it’s inevitable. And so, you have to change the rules of interpretation and once you say the Bible doesn’t mean what it says, then we have no idea what it means.”

- John MacArthur (pre-millennial)

“It’s a strange approach. Does the end matter? I think it matters. I think it matters to God...It matters to me to understand what God has said about the end. It’s the whole point of everything else. It’s the whole point of the beginning and the middle. The end is as divinely designed as the beginning, and God has given us massive amounts of revelation in the Scripture about the future. It has to matter to us.”

- John MacArthur (pre-millennial)

Sanctification

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification...”

- 1 Thess. 4:3



“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ***until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ***, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, ***we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...***”

- Eph. 4:11-15

“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”

- Jn. 17:17

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ***that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.***”

- 2 Tim. 3:16-17

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the *renewal of your mind*, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

- Rom. 12:2

We are to think properly about Scripture so that we will be equipped to accomplish the good works that God has prepared for us (see Eph. 2:10) and be conformed to the image of Christ.

Does the Bible tell us how to think properly about itself? Does the Bible have anything to say about hermeneutics?

Hermeneutics in Scripture

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”

- 2 Tim. 2:15

“Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar.”

- Prov. 30:5-6

Jeremiah 26:1-19, Micah 3:12 (Chou)

Psalm 8, Genesis 1:26-28 (Chou)

Psalm 33, Genesis 1:3 (Chou)

Psalm 104, Genesis 1 (Chou)

Matthew 24:15/Mark 13:14, Daniel 9:27 (Vlach)

1 Corinthians 9:8-11, Deuteronomy 25:4 (Vlach)

“...the NT persons and authors quoted the OT in ways consistent with the original meanings of the OT authors. These meanings and significances can be discerned by applying grammatical-historical hermeneutics consistently to all Bible passages.”

- Michael Vlach

An Important Principle

“...that you may learn by us *not to go beyond what is written...*”

- 1 Corinthians 4:6

“...contend for the faith that was *once for all delivered* to the saints.”

- Jude 3

Hermeneutics in Early Church History

Alexandria vs. Antioch

Plato → Philo → Clement of Alex → Allegorical

Origen's 3-fold hermeneutic

Augustine's 4-fold hermeneutic

Implication: The Allegorical hermeneutic is extra-Biblical and therefore not a valid hermeneutic

“I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem...And further, there was a certain man among us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place.”

- Justin Martyr (Dialogue with Trypho, early 100s)

“...this Antichrist...will reign for three years and six months...and then the Lord will come from heaven...restoring to Abraham the promised inheritance...for all these...were spoken in reference to the resurrection of the just, which takes place after the coming of Antichrist, and the destruction of all nations under his rule, in which the righteous shall reign in the earth...”

- Irenaeus (mid-100s)

“If, however, any shall endeavor to allegorize [prophecies] of this kind, they shall not be found consistent with themselves in all points, and shall be confuted by the teaching of the very expressions [in question].”

- Irenaeus (mid-100s)

“The most striking point in the eschatology of the [early church] age is the prominent [pre-millennialism], that is the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment. It was indeed not the doctrine of the church embodied in any creed or form of devotion, but a widely current opinion of distinguished teachers, such as Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius, and Lactantius.”

- Phillip Schaff (not a pre-millennialist)

“To these belong his statement that there will be a period of some thousand years after the resurrection of the dead, and that the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this very earth. I suppose he got these ideas through a misunderstanding of the apostolic accounts, not perceiving that the things said by them were spoken mystically in figures. For he appears to have been of very limited understanding, as one can see from his discourses. But it was due to him that so many of the Church Fathers after him adopted a like opinion, urging in their own support the antiquity of the man; as for instance Irenaeus and any one else that may have proclaimed similar views.”

- Eusebius (early 300s, speaking of Papias from the late 1st/early 2nd cent.)

Implication: The Apostle John wrote and taught the Book of Revelation with a literal hermeneutic in view

Conclusion

- Adopting the correct hermeneutic is vitally important for sanctification
- The testimony of Scripture supports a consistent, literal hermeneutic
- The testimony of the early church supports a consistent, literal hermeneutic

References

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