

Chapter Six

The Idealist Viewpoint

Basic Premise: The Book of Revelation is a non-historical and non-prophetic drama about spiritual realities. This method of interpretation has its origins among the ancient theologians of Alexandria, who spiritualised and allegorised much of the Bible to the extent that the many historical events were not treated literally at all but as symbolic stories from which we may learn.

That the Book of Revelation is not in any way to be interpreted literally, only symbolically, nor is it to be accepted as being prophetic of historical events or any progression of history in general, is for the Idealist, a very reasoned approach which ought not to be dismissed without some understanding as to why they believe as they do.

Although there are Idealists who treat all of scripture allegorically it is acknowledged that there are among them that only adopt this form of exegesis when they come to the Book of Revelation. They find comfort in their viewpoint because they see no need to make the symbolic statements fit into any chosen piece of history. Thus they avoid the great difficulties there are in establishing accurate and plausible interpretations of the visions and symbols and are safe from making false prophetic statements. They also avoid entering into the great divergence of opinions and interpretations that they see evident in the Historicist, Preterist and Futurist Viewpoints.

With this understanding, it is only logical for the Idealist to view the prophecies of the Book of Revelation as poetry or drama from which we may learn of spiritual realities in the ongoing battle between good and evil, between God and Satan, and the ultimate victory we have in Christ.

The retort is that with Idealism, everything is up for interpretation and this viewpoint is nothing but a licence to subjectively read into Scripture whatever you will. Critics of the Idealist viewpoint also warn **that constantly reading into God's Word** allegorical meanings is spiritually dangerous. They say that it inoculates one against receiving the truth from that which can be plainly understood. These same critics **declare that idealism or allegorism are synonymous with what the Bible calls "private interpretations"**, and warn that this approach to the Word of God is as ancient as the Garden of Eden where Satan is saying, **"Did God really say?"**

Let's look again at one of the Lord's instruction from the Twelve Rules for Handling God's Word and subject the Idealist Viewpoint to the Word of God.

Rule Number Four:

Do not attempt to interpret God's Word. Simply believe the plain reading.

2 Peter 1:20 NKJV

. . . no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation,

2 Peter 3:16 NKJV

. . . untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures.

Deuteronomy 29:29 NKJV

The secret *things belong* to the Lord our God, but those *things which are revealed belong* to us and to our children forever,

Obviously there are passages that are highly symbolic and for us to understand the meaning we would have to have an interpretation. However, this is where many people stumble. Attempting to interpret any vision or dream, metaphoric passage or parable from God's **Word that does not have an interpretation given in the Word itself** is a sure way to open the door to private interpretations. The **imagination is engaged and the result is obvious**. If God hasn't given the meaning in His Word, leave it alone! Remember, it is His prerogative to keep some things to Himself: "The secret things belong the Lord our God." It is the things that are revealed that are for us. Our response is not to interpret His Word, but to understand and believe it.

There is a huge difference **between interpreting God's Word and understanding God's Word**. People who interpret God's Word in their disobedience are lacking understanding:

Proverbs 4:7 NKJV

Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.

To speculate on the meaning of a symbolic passage of Scripture may be acceptable in some circumstances, provided we do not become dogmatic about our musings and attempt to make doctrine from it. **This tendency to interpret God's Word is THE major stumbling block** to understanding what it is that He actually intends for us to comprehend.

1 Corinthians 4:6 NKJV

. . . that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written . . .

This verse from Corinthians spells it out clearly. We must learn that it is not wise to think beyond what is written. It is absolutely foolish to give ourselves to interpretations. As Joseph said when he was presented with a dream:

Genesis 40:8 NKJV

Do not interpretations belong to God?

The folly of interpreting God's Word is first found in the Book of Genesis:

Genesis 2:8-9 NKJV

The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. 9 And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2:15-17 NKJV

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Genesis 3:1-5 NKJV

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; 3 but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" 4 Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

With just this one rule out of twelve we have enough to bring into question the whole idea of interpreting **God's Word rather than believing it.** Jesus warned that we would be faced with many coming in His name with deceptions when He was teaching about the end of the age. The doorway of Idealism has certainly made the way for the multitude of interpretations that we are presently assailed with. Wake up church! That there is a multitude of interpretations is the very evidence of a multitude of deceptions.

The only reliable interpretation of any vision, dream, metaphor, symbolic statement or parable, is that which conforms to: the revelation of Jesus given to us in the Gospels; the revelation of the Apostles; and the actual interpretations found in the Word of God. Every other interpretation is nothing but the private interpretation of man following in the footsteps of Satan giving Eve his interpretation of what God had said.

Historically, the Idealist Viewpoint is probably the oldest of the basic viewpoints by which the Book of Revelation is interpreted. Idealism, or allegorism as it is otherwise known, was advocated amongst some of the Jews hundreds of years prior to Christ and the Idealist Viewpoint toward all of Scripture, (not just Revelation) appears fairly early in church history in the writings of Clement of Alexandria (150-230AD) and Origen (185-254AD). Clement may have been first to write extensively on this subject, but it was Origen who was more influential in the Christian Community with his extreme advocacy of the allegorical approach to the Scriptures found in his writings (Origen DE PRINCIPIIS BOOK IV.CHAP. I. *That the Scriptures are divinely inspired*). Warning: his approach to the subject is quite seductive for he sounds quite reasonable to begin with. Eusebius of Caesarea (270-340AD) also promoted Origen's theory which can be summed up with this quote of his: ***"The Scriptures have little use to those who understand them literally."*** Everything to him was allegorical. We understand that there are symbolic passages and lessons and types from biblical history, but these particular 'church fathers' took it to the extreme and built up what has been called a mystical system of theology that on occasion went so far as to bring into question the literal historical statements of God's Word.

In Chapter Twelve of Every Believer's Prophecy Guide I presented the Prophecies of the Apostles, in which I gave a brief account of the gradual slide into apostasy by those who had assumed authority over God's people. This glimpse of church history will enable you to see the conditions that were present that fostered the growth of Idealism (otherwise known as Allegorism), along with many other false doctrines and practices which laid the foundation for the Idealist Viewpoint of Revelation.

So then, whilst the Idealist Viewpoint seems to have some redeeming features, their basic premise should be utterly rejected. At its best it is nothing but an excuse to let the imagination run wild and at its worst it is the doorway to a plethora of demonic deceptions designed to stumble the people of God.