

SECTION 20

Acts, Epistles and Revelation

INTERPRETING ACTS

(Blomberg, 126ff)

1. Pay careful attention to where a practice appears in the development of the church's understanding of the new covenant.

Many of the difficulties with interpreting and applying the book of Acts has to do with their transitional nature. With the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and God's sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we encounter the shift from the Old Testament age to the New Testament era. What was perfectly appropriate and even mandated for God's people frequently changes from old to new.

- The first generation of believers come to understand that they no longer need to offer animal sacrifices, because Christ is the once for all sacrifice for sin (Acts 13.39).
- The dietary laws are rescinded (Acts 10)
- There is no longer one uniquely holy land or temple (Acts 7) as the ideal place where God's people must worship him.

However, the first believers do not wake up the day after Pentecost and recognize everyone of these changes. The transitions come gradually and mean that not every apostolic action is meant to be imitated.

- The casting of lots to determine Judas' replacement follows a common OT practice but is not found again in the NT.

2. Look for Luke's narrative clues.

When no direct command is given to believers it is difficult to know whether a story offers models to imitate or avoid.

- Believer's sharing with one another in Acts 2.42-47 and 4.31-5.11 has been cited on the one hand, as an exemplary model and a reason for supporting modern day communism, and on the other hand, as a failed experiment and a practice to avoid! Both perspectives go beyond what the text is explicitly teaching, but it is telling that Luke describes the results of the practice as the caring for the poor.
- The judgment of Ananias and Sapphira (5.1-11), the one strikingly negative result, came not because they did or did not participate in the sharing but because they lied to what the extent they were participating (vv.2-4). So it is best to conclude that the pictures of communal sharing teach the necessity of helping the poor (Note the reasons why this took place in Judean but not in other churches – increased need as a result of Pentecostal conversions).

3. How slavishly must we mimic their models?

When Acts offers an exemplary model we must ask ourselves how consistently Acts itself reproduces the model? In the case of meeting the needs of the poor, there are three paradigms, all presented as helpful, but each quite different.

- In Acts 6.1-7 a precedent for the later office of deacon is established – no longer do the apostles administer a daily distribution of food or money for the poor. No longer do the apostles administer a common treasury.
- In Acts 11.27-30 a special offering is taken to meet the needs of Christians suffering during a famine.

These two along with the previous section establish three models for helping the poor that were quite different due to the differences in their circumstances.

In addition some models remain unchanged throughout the book. When Paul shares with the Philippian jailer he tells him, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” This is the consistent means of salvation throughout the book (Acts 4.12).

4. Another key principle in the interpretation and application of Acts has to do with contextualization – couching the gospel in language that best communicates its essence in a specific context.

Perhaps the main reason why one must look throughout the book to determine which models prove consistent and which ones vary is because the first Christians worked hard to incarnate the gospel in the diverse cultures in which they ministered. The sermons in Acts afford a classic example.

On the one hand there are common elements in almost all of them, irrespective of who the preacher is – an appeal to special or general revelation to establish common ground with the audience, reference to Jesus as the fulfillment of all previous religious aspirations, a focus on his death and resurrection as the heart of the Christian message, and an appeal to repent and believe in Christ for salvation.

On the other hand, no two speeches are identical. Paul, for example, carefully tailors his message to his audience.

- To ***Jews in the synagogue*** he appeals to OT history, and to numerous scriptures that he believes point to Christ (13.16-41).
- To ***pagans in Lystra*** he stresses God’s testimony through nature (14.15-18).
- To ***the philosophically minded Athenians***, he appeals to an unknown God to whom they have erected an altar, quotes a Greek poet, and plays Stoic and Epicurean philosophies against one another (17.22-31).
- And ***to the elders from the church at Ephesus***, he sounds most like the Paul of the Epistles – talking about the centrality of God’s grace, faith in Jesus, his atoning blood, and the danger of false teachers (20.17-35). This is not surprising since Paul’s letters are addressed to Christians.

5. Stress what Luke devotes the most space to in his narrative.

When one is not primarily giving commands but recounting history, a common device for highlighting the most crucial material involved the use of narrative space.

- Stories that are told in more detail or in a more leisurely manner are usually more important. (The day of Pentecost, Stephen's speech, the conversion of the Samaritans, the conversion of Cornelius),
- Another device is for the narrator to refer back to a particular event more than once. (Paul's conversion)

6. On the flip side of the previous point, often minor details in lengthy narratives are present simply because they better help us understand the central points, move the story along to the next scene, or add artistry or aesthetic delight to the account.

One needs to be careful therefore and not ascribe too much significance to the more peripheral details of a narrative. The best example in Acts is the lengthy description of Paul's ill-fated journey to Rome and the shipwreck that ensued. The numerous references to the various ports of call and the rich nautical language add reality and historical credibility to the account but we should not attempt to find points of personal application from these details.

Rather the point is that God's purposes will not be thwarted (cf. Acts 19) – neither storm, shipwreck, snakebite or man's devious plans can keep God from accomplishing his will.

INTERPRETING ACTS

(Duvall, Grasping God's Word)

I. We should thank the Lord for the book of Acts

II. The book of Acts is a Sequel to the Gospel of Luke

Compare the opening passages

Note the significant number of thematic and structural parallels between the two books:

- Prayer
- The work of the Spirit

There is an overlap between the two books as both describe the ascension of Jesus.

III. What kind of book is Acts?

Acts is history, accurately presented with a theological agenda.

IV. How is Acts Organized?

Guidelines for determining what is descriptive and what is normative:

1. Look for what Luke intended to communicate to his original readers.

When we find the message Luke has intended, we find the normative meaning of the passage.

- Acts 8: There are many good questions of a theological nature that could be asked from the passage but what is Luke's main point. Luke's main thought seems to be that the gospel is spreading beyond Jerusalem and its merely Jewish context.
- Set chapter 8 within its literary context.

2. Look for positive and negative examples in the characters of the story.

It makes sense that Luke would want us to imitate the positive example of holy men and women in the book of acts and to avoid the behavior of negative examples in the book. Positive characters like Stephen, Lydia, Silas are there to inspire and instruct. While the negative examples

of Ananias and Sapphira, Simon the Sorcerer, and King Agrippa are also there to instruct but they serve as a warning about what not to do.

3. Read individual passages in light of the overall story of Acts and the rest of the New Testament.

In some cases the movement of the story will help indicate what is intended by to be normative and what is merely descriptive.

- What about the coming of the Spirit in 2, 8, 10 and 19? (In 19 the disciples of John were not yet Christians)

4. Look to other parts of Acts to clarify what is normative.

- The selling of possessions

5. Look for repeated patterns and themes.

- The casting of lots to determine the will of God:

How does God make his will known to believers in Acts? He uses a variety of methods to do this: angels (8.26; 12.7), his Spirit (8.39; 10.19; 16.6-7); visions (9.10-12; 16.9-10); the Scriptures (1.20; 8.30-35; 18.24-26), circumstances (3.1-10; 8.1), prayer (13.1-3), theological discussion (15.1-21), and other believers

Interpreting the Epistles

- 21 of the 27 NT books are letters (approximately 35% of the entire NT).
- In our NT canon Paul's letters are in their present order by letters to churches (Largest to smallest) and then letters to individuals (largest to smallest). Paul's Epistles are named after the recipients.
- The Catholic Epistles are named after their authors because their recipients are mentioned in only a general way.

I. Characteristics of New Testament Letters

1. Compared to other ancient letters the New Testament Epistles are *typically* longer and more formal in nature.
2. The New Testament Epistles are the authoritative substitute for the author's personal presence.
3. The New Testament Epistles are occasional documents.
4. Ancient letters and the New Testament Epistles in particular were carefully written and delivered.
5. The New Testament Epistles were intended for the Christian Community

II. Things to look for when reading the New Testament Epistles

- These thoughts will apply to all types of biblical literature.
- 1. Observe any for words and thoughts that are repeated.
- 2. Look for contrasts the author draws.
- 3. Detect comparisons the author makes.
- 4. Note any lists that are delineated by the biblical writer.
- 5. Look for cause and effect relationships the author sets forth.
- 6. Seek to interpret any figures of speech the author uses.
- 7. Don't overlook the importance of conjunctions in the author's argument.
- 8. Don't overlook the importance of verbs and pronouns in determining the author's message.

III. The Form of New Testament Letters

1. Introduction

- Author
- Recipient
- Greeting
- Prayer

2. Body

3. Conclusion : Dr. Schreiner, in his book, *Interpreting Paul*, lists the various aspects included in Paul's concluding words (29-30).

- travel plans (Titus 3.12; Philemon 22)
- commendation (Romans 16.1-2)
- prayer (2 Thessa. 3.16)
- prayer requests (1 Thessa. 5.25)
- greetings (Romans 16.3-16, 21-23)
- final instructions and exhortations (Col. 4.16-17; 1 Tim. 6.20-21a)
- holy kiss (1 Thessa. 4.18; 2 Thessa. 3.17)
- autograph (1 Cor. 16.23-24; Eph. 6.23-24)
- benedictions (Jude 24-25)
- doxology

THE FORM OF ANCIENT LETTERS

SALUTATION

A to B – Greetings (Acts 15:23; 23:26; James 1:1)
Shalom
Grace

THANKSGIVING and/or PRAYER

“I thank my God through Jesus Christ” – Rom. 1:8
“I give thanks to God” – 1 Cor. 1:4
“We give thanks to God always” – 1 Thess. 1:2

BODY OF LETTER

Romans 1:18-11:26
Galatians 1:6-6:10
1 Corinthians 1:10-16:12

EXHORTATION AND INSTRUCTION

Romans 12:1-15:32
Galatians 5:1-6:10
Colossians 3:1-4:6

CONCLUSION

A wish for peace (2 Cor. 13:11); Greeting (1 Cor. 16:1-20a);
Kiss (Rom 16:16); Concluding Autograph (1 Cor. 16:21);
Benediction (Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 16:23-24)

IV. How to Interpret New Testament Letters

1. Read the entire book in one sitting.
2. Seek to understand as much of the original situation as you can from the biblical text.
3. Think in paragraphs.
4. Seek to understand what is to be understood as normative and what is to be interpreted as cultural.

Applying Paul's Epistles (Summary of Blomberg)

Normative or Cultural

1. Does the immediate context juxtapose a seemingly contradictory command?
 - Romans 12.17ff over against Romans 13.1-7
2. Does the command seem to contradict teaching elsewhere in Paul's writings?
 - 1 Cor. 14.33 over against 1 Cor. 11.2-16
3. Does the rationale for a specific command work equally well in all cultures?
 - 1 Cor. 11 – headcoverings
4. Does a command appeal to the way that God established things in OT times or to the way that he is reestablishing them in NT times?
 - Creation ordinances – 1 Tim 2.13 – male leadership; male leadership in the home Eph. 5.22-33
5. Does the command reflect a broad cross-cultural principle stated explicitly in the text?
 - Romans 3.23 – built on Romans 1.18ff
 - Romans 14.14 – has been abused for the context teaches that the reference is to clean and unclean food
6. Is the command to an individual or the church?
 - 1 Tim. 4.11-16 (v. 13 is applicable to Timothy and other ministers of the gospel but the rest of the passage can be applied more generally./

Major Interpretative Approaches to Revelation

1. Preterist (contemporary historical)

View – this approach focuses on the historical setting contemporary with the original author and recipients. It takes seriously the historical context attempting to understand the book the way John's readers would have understood it. This approach tends to devalue the end-times aspect of the book. (contemporary critical scholarship)

2. Historicist (continuous historical)

View – This approach understands Revelation to be a preview of the entire sweep of church history from the first century until Christ's return. No two proponents of this view are in agreement as to which parts of the book parallel which time in church history (Luther and Calvin)

3. **Idealist** (timeless symbolic) View - Understands Revelation to be a depiction of the ongoing battle between good and evil, between God and Satan. This view correctly sees the relevant timeless principles involved in the spiritual battle between good and evil, but it is not historically rooted (Amill. interpreters)

4. **Extreme Futurist** (eschatological) View – This approach understands the vast bulk of the book to refer almost exclusively to the events still in the future. The view is weak in demonstrating the relevance to original audience. (Robert Thomas)

5. **Modified Futurist** (eclectic) View - This view sees merit in several of the above options. While believing that Revelation clearly teaches about the future, those who hold this position also understand the book to have a message to its first readers, as well as presenting timeless truth (like the need of orthodoxy and forsaking spiritual complacency) for each generation of Christians. (Mounce, Ladd)

The Millennial Question

Amillennial (no [earthly] millennium) view understands the thousand years to be symbolic and refers to a lengthy period of time of unknown duration. The thousand-year reign in Rev. 20:1-6 is a symbol of his present spiritual kingship at the right hand of God in heaven. Many amillennialists understand that the millennium is this present period of world history in which the gospel is boldly proclaimed.

Postmillennial (“after” the millennium) view teaches that Christ will come back to the world after the world has been progressively “christianized” by the spread of the gospel (at the conclusion of the millennium) . When that process is complete Christ will return.

Premillennial (“before” the millennium) view holds that Christ will return to earth (Rev. 19:11ff) to set up his kingdom for a period of one thousand years (20:4-6).

Dispensational premillennialists suggest that the return of Christ will take place in two stages. The first will take place prior to the tribulation (the Rapture) and the second at the end of the tribulation.

The Historical premillennialists believe that the return of Christ is a single-stage event that will occur at the close of the tribulation but prior to the beginning of the millennium.

Seven Suggestions for Reading and Studying Revelation¹

The great John Calvin admitted that he wasn't sure what to do with the book of Revelation and therefore did not write a commentary on it, even though he had completed volumes on almost all of the rest of the New Testament. We today do not have the luxury of avoiding Revelation.

The book of Revelation pulls back the curtain to give God's people a glimpse of his plan for human history. Center stage at this cosmic drama stands Jesus Christ. The historical context was a situation where Christians were increasingly being persecuted for their faith because they refused to join the pagan parade. The pressure to bow the knee to Caesar rather than Christ was spreading, and hope was beginning to fade. In addition, some believers were becoming comfortable in their pagan surroundings and compromising their faithfulness to Christ. Revelation encourages the persecuted and is a warning those who are compromising morally and/or doctrinally.

We might say that the purpose of Revelation is to answer the question, "Who is Lord?" Historian Will Durant, in *The Story of Civilization*, concludes:

There is no greater drama in human record than the sight of a few Christians, scorned and oppressed by a succession of emperors, bearing all trials with a fierce tenacity, multiplying quietly, building order while their enemies generated chaos, fighting the sword with the word, brutality with hope, and at last defeating the strongest state that history has known. Caesar and Christ had met in the arena, and Christ had won. (Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization. Part III: Caesar and Christ*)

Revelation answers this question by creating a symbolic world in which readers may find the heavenly perspective they need to endure trying times.

1. Read Revelation with humility

We should resist the Revelation made easy approaches. Revelation is not easy! Reading Revelation with a humble mind means that we understand the difficulties involved in reading and preaching the book and being willing to admit that our interpretation could be wrong.

2. Try to discover the message to the original readers.

This is the top priority with any book of the Bible. Our tendency with Revelation is to ignore the first Christians and jump directly to God's message for us. We must beware of a "newspaper" approach to Revelation. The newspaper approach assumes that we must be living in the "final days". It also implies that in Revelation God was not really speaking to those to whom the book was written. If Christ does not return for another one thousand years the book still has a message for us.

Therefore a key question to ask is, "What was John trying to communicate to his audience?" If our interpretation would have made no sense to the original audience we probably have missed the meaning of the passage.

¹ Summary of Duvall and Hayes

3. Don't try to discover a strict chronological roadmap of future events.

Revelation does not necessarily advance in a neat linear fashion. The book is filled with prophetic-apocalyptic visions that serve to make a dramatic impact on the reader rather than to present a precise chronological sequence of future events.

For example – the sixth seal (Rev. 6.12-27) takes us to the end of the age. But when the seventh seal is opened, we are given a whole new set of judgments – the trumpets – and the seventh trumpet also takes us to the end of the age.

Then with the first bowl in 16.1-2 we are given another series of judgments. Revelation 19-22 paints another colorful and detailed picture of the end, but this is not the first time the readers have been translated to the end.

On a smaller scale, in Revelation 16.12-16 we are told that the stars fell to the earth . . . The sky receded like a scroll . . . and every mountain and island was removed from its place.” Yet in 7.3 we read the four angels are told not to “harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” To attempt to force a strict chronological sequence would not make sense. Rather than searching a strict chronological map of future events in Revelation, we should grasp the main message in each vision about living in the here and now.

4. Take Revelation seriously but don't always take it literally.

Some who insist that we should interpret Scripture symbolically do so in order to deny the reality of scriptural truth or a historical event. When they say that something is figurative or symbolic they mean that it is not real or that it did not happen. The truth in Revelation is that the picture language with its symbols, images, and figures is capable of conveying literal truth and describing literal events. Apocalyptic imagery is just another way of communicating reality. In my thought, the apocalyptic imagery of Revelation is just another way to emphasize historical reality rather than to deny or diminish it.

A key principle of interpretation is that our methods should match the literary genre used by the author. As a result we should be careful about taking apocalyptic imagery literally. We can actually pervert the author's intended meaning by forcing a literal interpretation on something that the author intended to be understood figuratively.

Example Revelation 17.9 – if we were to take the description of the woman who sits on the seven hills literally we would have to have one very large woman or seven very small hills. But if we interpret it not as a literal woman, we do not deny the reality of scripture at all. First-century readers would naturally have thought of woman as representing Rome, a city built on seven hills. The text probably also looks beyond Rome to powerful pagan enemies opposed to God. We can take the imagery seriously but not necessarily literally.

5. Pay attention when John identifies an image.

When John himself provides a clue to the interpretation of an image, we should take notice. For example

- 1.17 – the Son of man is Christ
- 1.20 – the golden lampstands are the churches (cf. 11.3-4)
- 5.5-6 – the Lion is the Lamb
- 12.9 – the dragon is Satan
- 21.9-10 – the heavenly Jerusalem is the wife of the Lamb or the church.

However, John also has some fluidity to his imagery. In other words John is not shy about using the same image to refer to different things. For example, the seven stars are the angels to the seven churches (1.16, 20; 2.1; 3.1). But John also uses the image of a star (not the seven stars) to refer to other things, such as God's agents of judgment (8.10-12) or even Jesus himself (22.16). In the same way the image of a woman can be used for a false prophetess (2.20), the messianic community (ch. 12), the harlot city or empire (ch. 17), and the bride of Christ (19.7; 21.9).

Even though John is free to use images to refer to different things, when he identifies an image, we should pay attention.

6. Look to the OT and historical context when interpreting images and symbols

Revelation uses language at several different levels:

- Text level: words written on the page
- Vision level: the picture that the words paint
- Referent level: what the vision refers to in real life

One of the most difficult aspects of reading Revelation is knowing what the images and symbols refer to. Even when we understand what is happening at the text and vision levels, we may not know what is going on at the referent level. In other words, we may know what Revelation is saying, but we may not know what it is talking about!

The first two places to go for answers are the first-century historical context and the OT. The historical context would be the final decades of the first century. How Revelation uses the OT is complex. Although there is no explicit OT quotations in Revelation, the book is filled with echoes and allusions to the OT. In fact, Revelation contains more OT references than any other NT book, with the OT appearing in almost 70% of Revelation's verses (Keener, *Revelation*, 33). Psalms, Isaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel make the most important contributions to Revelation.

Example – The background to the vision of Jesus in chapter 1.7; 12-15 (cf. Dan. 7.9, 13-14; 10.5-6). Notice how many words and phrases John uses to depict Jesus as a glorious divine being.

Understanding Daniel helps us to understand Revelation here. John often uses OT language to describe what he has seen and heard.

7. Focus on the main idea and don't press all of the details

This is probably the most important guideline. With most literary genres in the Bible, we begin with the details and build our way toward an understanding of the whole. With Revelation, however, we should start with the big picture and work toward an understanding of the details. As we seek to discover theological principles in Revelation, we should focus on the main ideas.

For example, the main idea of revelation 4-5 relates to the ascended and exalted Lord, who alone is worthy to execute divine judgments.

The details of any particular section will heighten the impact on the reader but will not change the main idea. Resist the temptation to focus on the details so that you miss the main idea. Don't let the main point of the section fade from view.

Revelation 12.1-7

We realize that not everyone will agree with our interpretation but it will serve as a model for the process one can go through to determine points of application.

1. What did the text mean to the original audience.

This step consists of understanding the context of chapter 12 so we may be able to interpret the symbols ("signs" in 12.1, 3) in light of the context.

- The chapter opens with a woman that is about to give birth to a child. An enormous red dragon is waiting to devour the child. But as soon as the child is born God snatches him up to heaven. God also provides a safe place on earth for the mother.
- The scene then shifts to a great battle in heaven. The dragon is defeated and heaven celebrates the victory with a "song."
- The devil, who has been cast down from heaven, pursues the woman with a vengeance and makes war against the rest of her offspring.

How would the first century audience have understood these characters?

Most likely they would *not* have thought of the woman as Mary, the mother of Jesus (a much later interpretation). They would have likely thought of the woman as the true Israel, the faithful messianic community who gives birth to both the messiah and the church. Both the male child and the offspring serve as keys for identifying the woman. Note that the prophets often portray righteous Israel as a mother and the symbols used in 12.1 confirm this interpretation (cf. Gen. 37.9).

The woman flees to a place of spiritual refuge for a period of 1260 days, the time of persecution between the ascension and exaltation of Christ and his future return (cf. 11.2; 12.14; 13.5).

The dragon is explicitly identified in the passage as the devil or Satan (12.9). This enemy of God attempts to devour the male child and lead the world astray. The detailed description of the dragon as red with seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns only adds to the awesomeness of the image

We are told that the male child will rule all nations with an iron scepter (12.5), an allusion to Psalm 2 that is applied even more clearly to Jesus in Revelation 19.5. The male child clearly represents Jesus Christ. After the child is born he is taken up to God. By moving straight from Jesus' birth to his ascension and enthronement, John stresses that Satan's plot has been foiled by Jesus' incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

The original audience would have understood the war in heaven (12.7-12) and the subsequent rage of the devil (12.13-17) as an explanation of two significant realities: (1) God has defeated Satan and his victory is certain. (2) God's people on earth will continue to suffer as victims of the Satan's rage.

This heavenly perspective would help John's readers to understand their hostile environment and encourage them to persevere. They too can appropriate the victory and overcome the devil by the "blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony," that is, by bearing faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ even if it costs them their lives (12.11)

2. What are the differences between the biblical audience and us?

Like the original audience we look back on Jesus' first coming and look forward to his second coming. Both the biblical audience and the contemporary live between the already and the not yet. Because we share this situation with the original audience we can expect to suffer. As offspring of the woman (12.17), we will also encounter the anger of the defeated devil.

Nevertheless, because we live in a different place and time (we are not living under Domitian's Roman empire), our suffering may take different forms and may vary in intensity. In general, churches in North America are not being persecuted in the same degree that churches in Asia Minor were being persecuted though that could change.

We do, however, struggle with many of the same temptations toward complacency and compromise that the churches of Asia Minor faced. Immorality, idolatry, false teaching, materialism, and other such sins are still alive and well in our day. Like our forefathers, we also feel the attack of the devil in our struggle to live holy lives in the midst of a world system opposed to God. We know what its like to be at war with the evil one. The comment in 12.11 that first century believers overcame him by the blood of the Lamb . . . and did not love their lives even unto death" will pose a strong challenge to North American Christians not accustomed to considering radical sacrifice for the cause of Christ, much less martyrdom.

3. What are the theological principles in the text?

The theological principles are built on similarities between their situation and ours. There are several principles or truths that emerge from this passage:

1. Spiritual warfare is real. There is a real devil that is opposed to God and bent on deceiving and destroying God's people.
2. Satan has been defeated by the life and redemptive work of Christ.
3. Christians can overcome the devil by living and proclaiming the gospel of Christ faithfully.
4. Christians can expect to suffer for being faithful in their witness to Christ.

4. How can the theological principles in the passage be applied in the lives of believers?

1. We need first to see how the principles in the text address the original audience. Lets use the third theological principle listed above. There are several common elements in the intersection between the principle and the original audience:
 - They were Christians
 - They experience victory over the devil by living and proclaiming the gospel of Christ
 - They do it even under the threat of death
2. We must discover a parallel situation in a contemporary context. In the original context the satanic attack takes the form of persecution. Consequently, we can say that any time believers suffer for their faith we have a parallel situation.
3. We need to seek to make our application specific. In our passage, persecuted believers overcome the devil by living and proclaiming the gospel of Christ. If the preacher creates a real world scenario to serve as an illustration or as an example of how a person might put the biblical principles into practice he must be certain that it is both faithful to the meaning of the text and relevant to the contemporary audience.

One example might be to come up with a scenario of how to engage the culture with the gospel rather than retreat to avoid persecution.

THE NATURE OF THE REVELATION

1. The Revelation as Apocalypse

- The taproot of apocalyptic is the Old Testament prophetic literature, especially as it is found in Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and parts of Isaiah.
- Unlike most of the prophetic books, apocalypses are literary works from the beginning.
- Most often the “stuff” of apocalyptic is presented in the forms of visions and dreams.
- The images of the apocalyptic are often forms of fantasy, rather than of reality.
- Because they were literary, most of the apocalypses were formally ideally stylized.

2. The Revelation as Prophecy

3. The Revelation as Epistle

The Exegetical Task

1. The first task of the exegesis of Revelation is to seek the author's (i.e. the Holy Spirit's) original intent.
2. Since Revelation is in part prophetic, one must be open to the possibility of secondary meaning, inspired by the Holy Spirit, but not fully seen by the author or original readers.
3. The interpreter must be careful of overusing "the analogy of Scripture" in the exegesis of Revelation.
4. Be cautious in handling the prophetic/apocalyptic nature of the book.