

Hermeneutics – Apocalyptic

“(1) In interpreting apocalyptic literature all that has been said of the rules and praxis for general interpretation applies at this point. (2) In the interpretation of apocalyptic imagery a complete literalistic method is impossible. Those who claim to be complete literalists with, reference to Revelation cannot consistently follow their program out. The issue is not between spiritualization and literalism but between lesser and greater degrees of spiritualization. To be thoroughly literal we would have to insist that a literal (actual) woman sat literally upon seven literal hills! that Jesus Christ has a literal sword coming out of his mouth! and that beasts can act and talk like men! To be literalistic in interpreting Revelation really means that the symbols of Revelation pertain to real, visible occurrences here on earth in contrast to some sort of gradual or historical fulfilment of the symbols in a thinner form. (3) Every effort must be made to discover whether the symbol had any meaning in the culture of the writer. This demands a very careful and exacting historical research by the exegete. (4) The passage in which the apocalyptic symbol appears must be carefully examined to see whether the meaning of the symbol is there revealed. (5) An examination must be made of history if the apocalypse is fulfilled in history. Fortunately, with reference to much of Daniel and Zechariah this is possible. (6) With reference to New Testament books, inter-Biblical apocryphal literature must be examined to see whether it contributed any of the symbols. (7) With special reference to the book of Revelation the Old Testament must be searched thoroughly for every possible clue to the symbols there used.”

— Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, 3rd rev. ed. e-book, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970), 207.