

II. The Hermeneutics of Predictive Prophecy

As soon as eschatology is mentioned, the issue of hermeneutics becomes very important. There are really two basic reasons why one's principles of interpretation as applied to predictive prophecy (the special use of "prophecy") are important. The first reason concerns the matter of eschatology. On the manner of the interpretation of prophecy rests the basis of distinction between Amillennialism, Postmillennialism, and Premillennialism, considered not merely as points of view regarding the relation of Christ's Second coming to the nature and time-frame of the kingdom of God, but as systems of eschatology containing detailed explanations of biblical apocalyptic material. The second reason, however, is much more important, since it concerns the larger question of whether biblical language, personages, and events are to be understood literally or figuratively, historically or symbolically, as well as the question of whether non-prophetic and prophetic Scriptures (in the special sense) are to be interpreted according to one set of hermeneutical principles or whether each category of Scripture is to be interpreted according to a different set.

In this study of this important issue we will look first at the principles and emphases set forth by some prominent writers who have addressed the issue, and then attempt to distinguish and clarify some basic conceptions and terms employed in discussions of the matter.

A. Principles and bases Set Forth by Certain Writers

1. William E. Cox

"One very basic conflict between different millennial groups is their hermeneutics -- the manner in which they interpret the Bible. In fact, this difference is what divides equally conservative men into differing camps with reference to the millennium. This fact is acknowledged frequently by all millennial schools of thought. Each of the millennial views has been held by conservative, scholarly men who were devoted to a correct interpretation of the Bible. And all have looked on the Scriptures as divinely inspired, and as the Christian's only rule of faith and life.

"No one millennial school has ever had a corner on conservative Christian scholars. Each of the three main schools -- historical premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism -- has a roll call of notable conservative giants of the faith. The different millennial views have arisen, not because of indifference toward the Bible, but simply because men interpreted the Word of God in a different manner . . .

"Since all conservative men use essentially the same method of interpreting Scripture, then how is it that they end up with such divergent views on the millennium? Does the Bible, when approached from the grammatical-historical literal point of view, actually give five completely different accounts of the millennium? No, the different teachings come about because of inconsistency of interpretation -- because of the inconsistent use of the known rules of hermeneutics. To be more specific, our differences head up in one major problem. That problem is the hyperliteral interpretation of certain -- and only certain -- verses of Scripture in order to justify preconceived unscriptural presuppositions. .