

Preaching Apocalyptic Literature

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Bob Fyall, Director of Rutherford House

Apocalyptic writings in Scripture have, on the whole, had a bad press in recent years. Novels like those by Tim LaHaye have, for example, sensationalised the events around the Second Coming, as have books of popular theology like Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*; and if any of you explore second hand bookshops, you may have come across the novels of Sydney Watson who, in an earlier generation, wrote the kind of novels that Tim LaHaye writes nowadays.

What I want to emphasise today is two things:

1. Apocalyptic literature is part of the whole Bible. It's not a separate continent (if you like) but is part of the whole Bible; but
2. It's got certain conventions, certain ways of presenting the gospel, which are in some ways different from other genres in the Bible.

We need to preach on apocalyptic literature because there is a lot of it in the Bible

There is Daniel, Zechariah, Revelation- these are probably the main examples in Scripture of apocalyptic books. But we do also have the so-called "Olivet Discourse": these are the words of our Lord on the Mount of Olives, and are sometimes called the "little apocalypse", spoken just before the events of the Passion and the Resurrection (Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21). There are also elements of apocalyptic writing in both the letters to the Thessalonians, especially at the end of 1 Thessalonians and in the second chapter of 2 Thessalonians; and in 2 Peter, especially chapter 3.

So that is the first thing: we need to engage with it and there is an awful lot to engage with, and we will miss a great deal of Scripture if we ignore apocalyptic literature.

Apocalyptic literature is different in some respects from other parts of the Bible

This forces us to ask the question, "What is apocalyptic literature?"

And one thing I want to make clear is this: I don't believe there is as rigid a division between prophecy and apocalyptic literature as many commentators believe. There have been many attempts to say that you have prophecy and then you have apocalyptic literature, which is later and to some people's minds inferior.

However, in my view apocalyptic literature is a particular type of prophecy, and is, actually, a particular emphasis you get in all the prophetic books- especially in the books I have mentioned. But there are some distinct characteristics of apocalyptic literature:

- (i) Apocalyptic literature tends to deal with symbolism. For example, numbers, especially 10, 7, 3, 4 and the notorious number 666 in the book of Revelation¹.
- (ii) Apocalyptic literature particularly emphasises the unseen world, but the unseen world is there throughout Scripture. And what is particularly emphasised in the apocalyptic literature is the heavenly throne room. Daniel has the picture of the heavenly throne room and the Son of Man coming with the clouds of Heaven. Revelation has the picture of the heavenly throne room in chapters 4 and 5 and

¹ In my view, if 7 is the number of perfection, then 666 is the number which almost makes perfection. That is what God writes over humanity- "not good enough", which seems to be the ultimate significance of 666. All human achievement is not good enough; only God can bring in the new creation.

so on. But you will also remember back in the earlier prophets, in Isaiah chapter 6, for example, we have the same vision in the call of Isaiah- the heavenly throne room.

- (iii) Apocalyptic literature uses vivid language- a lot of it is poetry, a lot of it is highly coloured prose.

So by way of summarising these introductory remarks, let me remind you that apocalyptic literature is, first, part of the whole canon of Scripture- its not an eccentric inhabitant of the Biblical world, it's an integral part of it. Second, there are certain conventions we have got to understand and take on board if we are going to take it seriously.

So I want to suggest 5 principles which I hope will help us get a lot out of apocalyptic literature and help us to preach it and teach it.

1. Fit Apocalyptic Literature into the Big Picture of the Bible

In one sense this is all I am going to say (the other four points are just a development of this). But this is a hugely important thing. We must see apocalyptic literature in its context in the whole of Scripture.

Now that applies to any Biblical text- it applies to teaching John or Romans as much as if you are teaching Daniel or Zechariah. But it is especially important for apocalyptic literature. And I want to try to develop this.

The first thing I want to say is that apocalyptic literature concentrates on times of crisis, times of great trauma, times of great stress, and times when the foundations of the faith are being shaken. Now in one sense the whole Bible deals with that. The whole Bible talks about the problems, the difficulties, and the sheer hard graft of the life of faith. However, the interesting thing is this: apocalyptic literature tends to be most popular among persecuted and harassed Christians. It tends to be unpopular among Western, middle-class Christians. And indeed many people have lost their nerve about apocalyptic literature- we feel that it is something that does not speak easily into our world. But I think the post-"9/11" world, the post-"7/7" world, the kind of threatening world we live in is making apocalyptic literature once again, as it always should have been, tremendously relevant to us.

And in particular Biblical apocalyptic literature deals with two periods.

(a) Apocalyptic literature is concerned with the exile

The exile, when Israel was taken to Babylon, called into question every aspect of Israel's faith. There was absolutely nothing they believed about God, about themselves and about the world that wasn't questioned. They were back in the first place where Abraham had come from- what C S Lewis called "*The Pilgrim's Regress*". Long ago God had called their ancestor, Abraham, to leave Ur of the Chaldeans; but now they are back in the land of the Chaldeans. What's happened to the covenant? God had said that he had made his covenant with his people and he wouldn't withdraw it. What had happened to the Davidic king? What had happened to the covenant with David that one of his descendants will reign for ever on the throne in Zion? What had happened to their whole worship system? They could still worship their God in Babylon, but they didn't have the whole system of priests, of prophets, and of sacrifices to help them. So the exile is a time which calls into question everything about Israel's faith.

Now that means something very important. Since this is such an unprecedented event, God sends massive preparation for it. God sends prophets to prepare them for exile. Isaiah, for example, prophecies in 8th century Jerusalem that the nation will be taken into exile; and he prophecies their return. That's why it is so wrong to split Isaiah into pre- and post-exilic prophetic messages, because, if you do that, you lose this massively important word of God given to these people before exile to prepare them for it. And if you do the same to Daniel, by claiming this was written in the 2nd century, you are taking away all the comfort, all the encouragement and all the necessary strength that the book is giving.

And in effect what prophets and apocalyptic writers are giving is a whole theology of history. You could put it in this way: God will be God, and the world will know it.

Now God is God at the moment, whether the world knows it or not. But the apocalyptic writers are saying God will be God and the world will know it. Let me read some words from Daniel chapter 4 verses 34b-35:

*His dominion is an eternal dominion;
his kingdom endures from generation to generation.*

*All the peoples of the earth
are regarded as nothing.
He does as he pleases
with the powers of heaven
and the peoples of the earth.
No one can hold back his hand
or say to him: "What have you done?"*

These are not the words of Daniel, but the words of Nebuchadnezzar. He has been humbled, restored and now comes to make this astonishing confession that this is the God who controls history. And not only controls history, but reveals history to his servants, the prophets- it was what Amos said long before: *Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets*². These prophetic writers, before the exile, Amos, Isaiah, Micah, Habakkuk, Jonah, others, they are saying that there is going to be a time of disaster, and that is going to be followed by a time of blessing. And the exilic writers, Daniel and Ezekiel in particular, strengthen the people during that time. And, of course, the post-exilic prophets call people back to God and say, "Look- you are in danger of slipping back into old ways."

So apocalyptic literature is particularly given to help people during a time of exile, which is a time when God seems to be absent. It's not difficult to see the relevance of that to our own society. We do not look out on a society in which God is acknowledged to be God. And so this is a message we need to proclaim- "God will be God and the world will know it".

(b) Apocalyptic literature is concerned with the Last Days

By the Last Days I mean the whole time between the comings of Christ- these are the Last Days according to Scripture. The Last Days began when Christ came into the world. In these last days, Hebrews tells us, God has spoken to us by His Son³. So if someone comes along and says, "I've got a message for the Last Days" say, "Good for you- so do we. Here it is. This is the message for the Last Days. The message of Jesus Christ."

But the word of God through the prophets and apocalyptic literature particularly concentrates on giving us a word for the Last Days.

The book of Daniel looks to the Last Days

The later chapters of the book of Daniel talk about a period that is still to come in the 2nd century. After Alexander the Great's empire was destroyed and split up into four parts, the King of the North, Antiochus Epiphanes, launched a campaign of hatred against Jerusalem, intending to make Jerusalem desolate. And the apocalyptic writers talk about this 3½ year period- they call it "*time, times and half a time*". That is symbolic language. Antiochus wasn't a great figure in the world stage, but he is hugely important to the apocalyptic writers because he is attacking God's people. And by attacking God's people he is trying to prevent God's purpose. And God's purpose is to bring the Messiah, to bring the one who will destroy the

² Amos 3:7

³ Hebrews 1:2

serpent. So Daniel sees this period that is still to come. This 3½ year period where Antiochus, for example, offers pig's flesh in the Holy of Holies, and sets up a statue of Zeus in the temple and so on. And that is referred to in Daniel (to which Jesus makes reference) "*the abomination which makes desolate*"⁴. And in the book of Revelation, that phrase "*a time, times and half a time*" applies to the whole period between the comings. The period when God's work is going on unseen, when Christ has ascended to heaven, but the devil is sending his emissaries, the Beast and the False Prophet- and we will come back to that.

So you can see that Daniel is given a vision which is fulfilled in immediate history and in the Last Days.

So we see the exile and the Last Days as the heart of Biblical apocalyptic literature. And so we have got to identify the specific thrust of each of these periods.

The exile prepares the people of God for the Last Days

Daniel is in the exile himself, and so experienced the challenges to Israel's faith first hand. Now the real challenge to Israel's faith was this: God had said, "build me a temple [and first of all a tent] and I'll live among you". And in particular Israel was to house the ark of the covenant there. And God promised to meet Israel at the mercy seat. What has happened? The temple is burned and almost certainly the ark was burnt and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's armies when they sacked Jerusalem and burned the temple⁵. So it throws up the question, "Is God still on the throne? Is he still alive and well?" And so Ezekiel has that tremendous vision in chapter 1 (which is really an apocalyptic chapter), where he sees the chariot throne of God, and in effect what he sees is a mobile ark of the covenant hovering above Babylon- in other words, the God of Israel is alive and well in Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon.

What's happening? The people are being prepared for a time when the temple no longer needs to be a physical structure, for a time when Jesus turns his back on the temple and says, "I am the true temple". That's what John says- "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory..."⁶ In other words, the ark of the covenant becomes Jesus the Messiah. And it took the exile to teach people that.

And we need to be teaching that today, don't we? We still have this sentimental attachment to places so often, don't we? And we forget that Jesus died outside the sacred enclosure so everywhere becomes holy ground, as William Cowper says.

The events in Daniel look forward to the time when God will be God, and all the world will know it

So the particular focus of Daniel and Ezekiel is on the Last Days. And let me give you one other example of that. Remember that great chapter in Daniel 3 where Daniel's friends are thrown into the blazing furnace and Nebuchadnezzar sits there gazing into the flames. Those of you who remember coal fires will no doubt recall sitting and looking into the flames imagining you are seeing things. And that is presumably what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. "Did we not throw three men into the flames?" he asks. You would have thought that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, king of the world, could have counted. But he says, "I see four- and the form of the fourth is like that of the son of the gods." You see what is happening. Without all the paraphernalia of the image, without the bands and banners Nebuchadnezzar had set up, God had taken up his challenge. Nebuchadnezzar had said, "Which god is able to rescue you from out of my hand?" and there He is, in the flames, marginalising Nebuchadnezzar.

God will be God and the world will know it.

⁴ Daniel 11:31; Mark 13:14

⁵ Nobody really knows what happened- although Stephen Spielberg thinks he does

⁶ John 1:14

Zechariah looks ahead to the fulfilment in the New Creation

Zechariah (a less well known but a very important book) preaches after the exile when God's promises don't seem to have been fulfilled. This is the same period as the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and the prophecies of Haggai and Malachi. If you read these you will see the kind of things that were happening- and it is all very downbeat, and very low key; and questions are asked such as, "Where is the desert blossoming like the rose? Where are the nations who are coming to Zion to worship the King of kings?" And Zechariah says, "Look! This is happening- God is going to make it happen, and there is a Day coming when it will happen." And in his later visions he talks about the streets of the city full of old people and children playing. Now when people returned from exile they were mainly the young and the fit. People with children wouldn't travel. Old people would stay in Babylon. Zechariah is looking forward to a time when all God's people will be together. Not that some will be young and some will be old in that sense, but that the whole of God's people will be gathered in the city and children will play in the streets. When do children play in the streets? When the streets are safe. He is pointing forward to this glorious future and to the Day when the Lord will be the one God and He will be acknowledged.

The Olivet Discourse brings together two horizons: the destruction of the temple and the second coming of Christ

And then in the so-called "Olivet discourse" Jesus is bringing together two horizons- the near horizon (the fall of Jerusalem in AD70) and the far horizon (His coming again), which the fall of Jerusalem prefigures.

So fit apocalyptic literature into the big picture. See that this is an important stream running through the whole Bible. The stream that shows that God who made the world, is the God who is going to remake it.

Remember in one sense the whole Bible is eschatological. Everything points forward. You could say that the Bible falls into two parts. I don't mean the Old and New Testaments. I mean Genesis 1:1 and the rest. In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth. And in a sense everything else is a development and unfolding of that. Did He get it wrong? Did He do a bad job? And the answer is "no" because One Day He is going to make a new heaven and a new earth which will not only be as good as the one that was made but will far surpass it.

2. Deal with apocalyptic literature faithfully and imaginatively

A lot of apocalyptic literature is poetry. I love poetry; I used to be an English teacher and I really love poetry. However, not everybody loves poetry, but if you are going to preach apocalyptic literature, you are going to have to learn to start loving poetry. You have to "sing" these words not just read them intellectually.

And when I say that we have to deal with apocalyptic literature imaginatively and faithfully, obviously the faithfully refers to being faithful to Scripture; but on the other hand we have got to realise that if Scripture speaks to us in the language of poetry, it is inviting our imaginations and personalities to be involved, not just our intellect.

Let's look at a few points which flow from this.

(i) Numbers

Numbers in apocalyptic literature aren't just randomly chosen.

The number that is so important in apocalyptic literature is the number 7. There are 7 churches in Asia. There are 7 spirits before the throne of God. And so on. And that ultimately comes from the 7 days of creation. In other words, apocalyptic literature is linked to the creation story and the new creation as I have said already. God is at work in the whole of history, the whole of time.

The 7 churches represent the whole church between the comings- not a chronological sequence, that as the church starts she is Ephesus-like and she continues throughout history until she arrives at a Laodicea-like state, but that it represents the church throughout the ages, and so at any one time we can find examples of one or all of them. And they warn us of the dangers and open our eyes to the opportunities. The danger, first of all, of becoming loveless and hard. The danger, second, of heresy, of wrong teaching. The danger, third, of wrong living. But also the opportunities, the gospel opportunities- "*See I have placed before you an open door*"⁷ says the Lord to the church in Philadelphia, for example. The opportunity to be faithful, and so on.

And "4" seems to me to come from the rivers of Eden. Four rivers ran out of Eden to water the garden. And 4 in apocalyptic literature means the earth as a whole. The 4 beasts, which we shall come to in a moment, which rise out of the sea in Daniel 7 represent not just 4 specific kingdoms but the whole of human power throughout history and geography.

So these are some of the symbolic numbers.

(ii) Imagery emphasises the material nature of the people and the events.

For example, the 4 beasts in Daniel 7 are very real creatures. They are not simply shadowy figures; they represent, in the first instance, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. But they also represent power throughout the world and throughout the ages. They represent human power which is very real.

And notice that they come out of the great sea. And the great sea, first of all, is the Mediterranean. When the Old Testament talks about "the great sea" it means the Mediterranean. When the Old Testament talks about "the great river" it means the Euphrates. And so when it talks about the land from the great sea to the great river that is the limit of their geographical horizons at that time, and it means the whole earth.

In Revelation 13, we see two beasts arise out of the sea, and these along with the dragon, represent the unholy trinity. The dragon summons two beasts- one is the beast which rises and dies again (a parody of Christ Himself); and the other beast, the False Prophet, is a parody of the Holy Spirit because he glorifies the first beast.

Now many of our brothers and sisters throughout the world suffer terribly from the first beast. He represents the beast of persecution; the beast of militarism; the beast of totalitarianism.

We particularly suffer in the West from the second beast- the false prophet, false teaching and wrong teaching, which has done so much damage to the church in the last two and a half centuries. And Peter, of course, talks about this in the second chapter of his second letter, as Jude does as well- and both these books have apocalyptic elements.

Ultimately, in other words, these symbols are related to the doctrine of creation. God created a world; that world is also sinful and in Daniel we see this again. At the beginning of Daniel 7 we see the 4 winds of heaven raging over the great sea. And the 4 winds there seem to me to be a deliberate echo of Genesis 1 with the Spirit moving in creation. The 4 spirits or 4 winds represent the Holy Spirit and His work of convicting the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. In other words, human power comes into being because of the activity of God, the activity of the Spirit. Paul says this is a more prosaic way in Romans 13:1, "*The authorities that exist have been established by God.*"

But the devil is also at work. The great sea is not just the literal sea, but the abode of evil, the abode of Leviathan, the abode of the evil spirits. It is a picture of God and Satan in a titanic battle throughout human history. And that, of course, takes us right back to Genesis 3: *he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel*⁸. This titanic struggle is set up between God and

⁷ Rev 3:8

⁸ Gen 3:15

the devil. And the imagery of these apocalyptic books is particularly powerful in presenting that.

3. Link the present with the eternal

All preaching must link the present with the eternal. If it doesn't do that, we are just going to talk platitudes. Instead, when we are preaching, we must proclaim great truths. If I want platitudes about the state of affairs or the state of the weather I can take a ride in a taxi or go for a haircut; but that's not what the pulpit is for. The pulpit is there to present great truths which link the present with the eternal; and apocalyptic literature helps us here.

Let me give you 2 examples.

- (i) In Daniel, there are a number of visions, which arise out of the precise historical setting. Daniel spends his entire life in exile- he is probably a teenager when we meet him in chapter 1, and almost certainly in his eighties by the end of the book. And during that time he works in Babylon as a civil servant. And God is speaking to him and showing him the link between the present and the eternal- and we need to do that as well.
- (ii) In Revelation 2 and 3 you know that the setting and the cities, where these churches were, is the source for much of the imagery. The present is linked with the eternal.

In many ways I am making a very obvious and straightforward point. We have to preach eternal truths to the people to whom we are preaching. We have to preach in the real world; but we have got to be in touch with the real unseen world. If we just preach from this seen world, we will only preach platitudes. We will merely give advice. If we simply go off into the spiritual stratosphere and ignore the people in front of us, we'll simply not connect. We need to link the two together. And apocalyptic literature does this.

Apocalyptic literature is practical

And another side to apocalyptic literature is that it is very practical. 2 Peter 3 speaks in an apocalyptic passage of the heavens and earth being burned up, and everything on the earth's surface being laid bare. And what does Peter then say? Does he say, "Go therefore and speculate about it." No, he says nothing of the sort. He says, "*So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him*⁹", because we are waiting for that Day which is coming.

So Daniel, Revelation and 2 Peter speak to real people living in the real world.

And in Daniel 12:1-3 Michael says to Daniel, "*But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.*" This is a tremendous encouragement in gospel work. Those who turn to righteousness will be there when the physical universe is gone.

This is the same in Psalm 102:26

*They will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.
Like clothing you will change them
and they will be discarded.*

In other words, gospel work is going to last into eternity.

⁹ 2 Peter 3:14

And apocalyptic literature is absolutely saturated with that. These guys like Daniel are able to speak into this world because they are in touch with that world. Remember the importance of prayer in Daniel. Daniel opens his windows toward Jerusalem in chapter 6. What does that mean? It can't mean he opens his windows to the literal city, which has not yet been rebuilt- the exile was still going on; no one had returned; there is nothing there. What Daniel is doing is opening his window to the reality of which Jerusalem speaks- Zion, the City of our God. Remember what the author of Hebrews says: *But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.*¹⁰

And one final point. Daniel 11 and 12 show us how providence and free will are linked together. In many ways that is the big Biblical issue. God plans everything, God works out everything according to the purpose of His will- if He doesn't there can be no prophets and no apocalyptic as there is nothing to reveal. But some deny this, like Clark Pinnock. And if he and others are right in saying that even God does not know certain things are going to happen, how are we going to link that with what we read in Daniel 11? There we see how very detailed predictions are made about events that were still to happen. And liberals say that if this is correct it means that the characters are puppets- they are robots. It was predestined for them. But if you read the chapter carefully you will find that two themes come up over and over again. The theme of love and marriage is the first one; and the theme of ambition and power is the other. In other words these people were not puppets- at every stage in their lives they were making choices. Love stories and stories about ambition are stories of choices and decisions; stories (again) about real people in the real world.

4. Link apocalyptic literature with other genres in the Bible

This is another way of saying, "*Fit it into the Big Picture*". But more specifically you must see how apocalyptic literature usually grows out of other types of writing.

Let us look at Revelation, for example. And if you want to preach on Revelation effectively, one of the ways to do it is to see how the book describes itself. And the book describes itself in 3 ways:

- (i) It is an apocalypse, a revelation of Jesus Christ- the unveiling of the Son of Man who comes on the clouds of heaven¹¹, who opens the scroll, who will be the judge of the living and the dead and will complete God's purposes.
- (ii) It is a prophecy- "*Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy*"¹²; in other words, this is the fulfilment of the involvement of God in history.
- (iii) It is a letter¹³. Remember what we call the letters to the 7 churches are really personal notes. Rather like you send a circular (everyone does this at Christmas now) to particular friends, but to particular friends you add particular notes. Remember the whole book of Revelation is a letter, and is to be read by the 7 churches. In other words, what is said to Ephesus is also relevant to Laodicea. And so on. In other words, this is doctrine which the whole church needs throughout the whole of its history. Its not just apocalyptic literature and prophecy; it's a letter- in fact it is as much a letter as the letter to the Romans, so we need its teaching.

The apocalyptic elements in Daniel are linked by the theme of "What is reality?"

In Daniel 3, Nebuchadnezzar's view of reality is: "Is this not great Babylon which I have built?" And then the voice from heaven comes and says, "Nebuchadnezzar- you are proud and you will be humbled". These are two different views of reality. We have got the reality of Babylon, which is real enough, and the reality of the tree, which is the vision that God gave Nebuchadnezzar. And of course seeing the vision of Nebuchadnezzar's empire under a tree reminds us that it was created by somebody else. Nebuchadnezzar thought that he had

¹⁰ Hebrews 12:22

¹¹ Revelation 1:7

¹² Revelation 1:3

¹³ Revelation 1:4

created Babylon; he hadn't- it was just a tree that someone else had created and someone else would destroy.

The “Olivet Discourse” links with the themes of each particular gospel

Let us look, as a final example, at the so-called “Olivet Discourses”. It is interesting to see how the different gospel writers use it to carry forward the main theme of the gospel.

Matthew, as you know, builds his gospel around a number of blocks of teaching. And in Matthew the Olivet Discourse is linked with parables such as the virgins, the talents and so on which also point forward to the future.

In Mark it is linked with the various confrontations with the religious leaders- remember that the Son of Man is going to come on the clouds of heaven and in the glory of his Father, and so at the end of the confrontation this will reveal who was right and who was wrong.

And Luke particularly focuses on the temple and links it with the story of the widow and the temple treasury. And it is in Luke that Jesus weeps as He leaves the temple, as He turns His back on it.

5. Preach Christ

In a sense this sums up everything else. When we are preaching Daniel and Zechariah we are preaching Christ. So we must preach all this Christologically.

In Daniel 7 the Son of Man comes with the clouds of heaven. In other words, the Son of Man, the Last Adam, comes to remake and renew creation. Remember that Paul develops that in Romans 5- the last Adam defeats sin and Satan. And then in 1 Corinthians 15 he also develops this: the last Adam brings about the new creation.

(Incidentally that helps us understand the phrase that many people misunderstand in 1 Corinthians 15. Remember in 1 Corinthians 15 (which in many ways is an apocalyptic writing, in the way I have defined apocalyptic literature) Paul talks about Christ ruling over everything, subduing everything including death, and then He Himself being subject to the Father. Now that does not mean that the eternal Son of God becomes inferior to the Father, because if that were to happen the gospel simply evaporates. Jesus becomes one with us but he is not one with God. The point is that he is called the Last Adam- and as the representative man hands over to the Father the kingdom which he won by his death and his resurrection. He has opened that kingdom to believers. The new Heavens and the new earth are possible.)

So preach Christ. Preach Him from Revelation 4 and 5. He is the Alpha and Omega. Remember the two-fold song in Revelation: the song of creation (“*You are worthy O Lord... for you have created all things*”¹⁴); and the song of redemption, which has these significant words added: “*To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb...*”¹⁵ The Lamb is worshipped along with the Father. And you get that in Revelation 15- the redeemed in heaven sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb¹⁶. This is the whole big picture of the two testaments, Moses and the law, and Christ and the New Creation. They are linked together.

In Revelation 12 and 13, he is the destroyer of Satan. This is the culmination of that battle that began in Genesis 3, and that battle which is still raging. At the First Coming the young Redeemer lands incognito behind enemy lines; He meets the serpent and gives him a death blow; but the serpent is still active; and the final results of that victory are still to be seen.

So in a sense these are the two bookends. Preach the big picture and preach Christ. Because if you preach the big picture then you are preaching Christ. And these others points fit into that.

¹⁴ Revelation 4:11

¹⁵ Revelation 5:13 (emphasis added)

¹⁶ Revelation 15:3

So let me give you some comments to finish with:

- (i) Take eschatology seriously. Apocalyptic literature is not just about the last things; as we are already in the Last Days, it has a message for us today. That's what Paul means in Acts 17 when he says, "*For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead*". Because the resurrection has happened, and because the ascension has happened, the judgment is already in process. It's not as if we live in this world, and then at the end there is the resurrection and the Second Coming. It is, as John said, that eternal life is now. It's here already.
- (ii) Look for this pattern of death and resurrection throughout Scripture. In a sense you get this right from the beginning. Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden of Eden, which is a kind of exile. And then the Lord God announces the gospel, which gives hope for a resurrection. Then there is Israel, having left one exile in Egypt, goes to another- this pattern of death and resurrection.
- (iii) Emphasise the unity of the Testaments. Apocalyptic literature brings together the exile and the Last Day, because it concerns the Son of Man, who is both the Last Adam and the Lord from Heaven, both the man from dust and the man from Heaven.

And so apocalyptic literature, in its unique and creative way, is all about Christ, the Son of Man, and His work- to defeat Satan and bring in the New Heavens and New Earth.