Title: Evaluation of the historical, prophetical, and historico-prophetical approaches to Revelation 2 and 3

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Abstract:

Scholars diverge widely in the interpretation of Revelation in general and Rev 2 and 3 in particular. Three approaches to Rev 2 and 3 stand out: the historical, the prophetical, and the historico-prophetical. The historical approach confines the seven churches of Rev 2 and 3 in the 1st century AD while the prophetical projects them in the eschatological day of the Lord after the Second Advent. The historico-prophetical fills the gap between the first two approaches by stretching out the seven churches in the history from the 1st century AD up to the Second Advent.

The evaluation of the three abovementioned approaches was based on four criteria. The first criterion established that the seven churches present some apocalyptic and prophetical features that qualify them as apocalyptic-prophetical messages. Since they are part of a big letter, Revelation, their epistolary nature is evident. The historical approach emphasizes the epistolary character of the seven churches but overlooks their apocalyptic-prophetical nature. By contrast, the prophetical approach emphasizes the apocalyptic-prophetical nature of the seven churches but overlooks their epistolary character. Only the historico-prophetical approach recognizes both the apocalyptic-prophetical and the epistolary nature of the seven churches and meets criterion 1.
The second criterion demonstrated connectedness between the seven churches and the rest of Revelation. It revealed that (1) Rev 3:21 constitutes an interlock between the seven churches and the two throne scenes in Rev 4:1-8:1 and Rev 19:1-21:4; (2) in the chiastic structure the seven churches (church militant) correspond to the church triumphant of Rev 21 and 22; and (3) in the marriage covenant structure the bride betrothed in Rev 1-3 (seven churches) is the same that prepares herself in Rev 4-18 for her wedding with the Lamb that happens in Rev 19 followed by a honeymoon in Rev 20 and eternal settlement in Rev 21-22. The historical and the prophetical approaches that confine the seven churches respectively in the 1st century AD and in the time of the end fail to perceive such a progression that only the historico-prophetical approach notices and so meets criterion 2.

The third criterion discussed Rev 1:1; Rev 1:19; and Rev 4:1b. It demonstrated a double application of the seven messages made clear in the study of the time marker μετὰ ταῦτα (after these things) in connection with γίνομαι (to take place) in the discourse of the One called the Alpha and the Omega that climaxes with γέγονα (they have taken place) in Rev 21:6. Both the historical and the prophetical approaches fail to perceive this principle of double application. Only the historico-prophetical approach points it out and so meets criterion 3.

The fourth and last criterion discussed the time elements in the use of μέλλω (to be about to), ἐν τάχει (quickly), ἐγγύς (near); the tenses used in the seven churches; and the meaning of ἔρχομαι (I am coming). The use of these time elements does not mean that the event will happen right away. In Revelation the timing between the First and Second Advents is telescoped. Both the historical and prophetical approaches that confine the seven churches in a short span of time either in the 1st century AD or in the end time fail to perceive the telescope principle in
Revelation. Only the historico-prophetical approach meets criterion 4. It is the only approach that meets all the four criteria and so appropriate for Rev 2 and 3.