



It is Not a Book for Everyone

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near. (Revelation 1:1-3)

I get the feeling that many people rush past the opening verses of Revelation (perhaps even the first few chapters) in order to get to the seals, trumpets and bowls—what they feel is the “important” part of the Book. There are two very important conditions which are provided in these opening verses which make all the difference for understanding everything else to come: (1) This is not something that is written for everyone, but given “to show His **bond-servants**, the things which must soon take place”, and (2) hearing and reading this Scripture (as with all Scripture, actually) must be followed up with **heeding** it—that is, putting it into practice. If the Book of Revelation is written exclusively for those who are in a right relationship with Christ who are actually putting His Word into practice, what are the odds it will ever make sense to those living contrary to His Word and ways?

A bond-servant is someone who is under contractual obligation to serve another. A common scenario would be someone who could not pay their debts, so they would enter a legal arrangement wherein they would become a servant for however long it took to repay the one who paid the debt for them. It was a two-way relationship wherein the “master” did not simply loan money, but clothed, fed and sheltered the debtor for the duration of the contract. During that time, the debtor became a servant who worked exclusively for their new master, living in the master’s house, concerned only for that master’s business. Does this sound familiar? A biblical bond-servant is a born-again believer in a covenant relationship with Christ (who paid the debt of their sins) and no longer works and lives for himself in the world, but exclusively in the Master’s house to carry out the Master’s will.

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People to whom the title of “bond-servant” is attributed in Scripture are Simeon (Lk. 2:22), Paul (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Titus 1:1), Timothy (Phil. 1:1), James (James 1:1), Peter (2 Pe. 1:1), John (Rev. 1:1), Epaphras (Col. 1:7), Tychicus (Col. 4:7), Moses (Rev. 15:3) and Christ Himself. (Phil. 2:7) It is quite an impressive list of scriptural role models, people whose wisdom to understand the deeper things of God came from having first and foremost been faithful in all the small and basic things. Addressing Revelation to bond-servants is the perfect bookend to what was first established in Daniel where insight and wisdom is equated with righteousness and obedience to the Word where understanding prophecy is concerned.

“Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever...Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand.” (Daniel 12:3, 10)

If the foundational Old Testament prophecies were established as something that will be understood by hearts obedient to God’s Word and ways, it should be no surprise that their New Testament counterpart is likewise endowed not to the academically qualified, but the biblically faithful. The first step to “understanding” comes from first putting the rest of God’s Word into practice.

So often it seems there are those who believe prophecy is something they just need to “work out” or piece together intellectually. In reality it is just like every other form of Scripture: it has to be put into practice. The prerequisite for understanding all things prophetic is first learning and being obedient to the fundamentals. Rather than being a test of knowledge it is, like most things biblical, a test of faithfulness—one who does not merely **hear** God’s Word but is actually **doing** it.

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:23-25)

Understanding of the Book of Revelation is not promised to those prequalified as theologians, scholars, or otherwise academically gifted, but to those who prove their faith in Christ by becoming what James describes as “*an effectual doer*”. Such a person

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both James in this passage and John in the opening verses of Revelation call “blessed”— a partaker of God’s nature through faith in Christ.

For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (2 Peter 1:4)

Cross-reference this teaching of Peter, and what was just quoted from James, with John’s opening in Revelation and we see that the contents of Revelation is provided to those who have “*escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust*” because they are someone “*who looks intently at the perfect law...and abides by it*”. Or as John states, they “*heed the things that are written in it*”. Just as the promises of the Gospel cannot be fully appreciated until one lays down their life at the cross and begins to live exclusively for Christ their Master, neither can the rest of God’s Word be fruitful without such devotion.

I would even argue that this relates to the opening letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 who are each encouraged to be “overcomers”. How much understanding is going to come to those who have lost their first love (Ephesus), those who are not faithful in the face of persecution (Smyrna), those who stray into idolatry (Pergamum), those who succumb to spiritual seduction (Thyatira), those whose deeds are incomplete in the sight of God (Sardis), or those who are so lukewarm that they have become spiritually blind to their backslidden state? (Laodicea) Every negative condition highlighted in these letters is remedied by returning to repentance and the practice of God’s Word.

Matthew captures the essence of the Gospel message in the Sermon on the Mount by providing ten “Beatitudes” (Mt. 5:3-12), all qualities that can only be appreciated by those who accept and put the Gospel message into practice. Likewise, Revelation itself contains seven beatitudes for those who accept its message:

***Blessed** is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near. (Revelation 1:3)*

*And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, “Write, **Blessed** are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.” (Revelation 14:13)*

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*(“Behold, I am coming like a thief. **Blessed** is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.”) (Revelation 16:15)*

*Then he said to me, “Write, ‘**Blessed** are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.” (Revelation 19:9)*

***Blessed** and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:6)*

*“And behold, I am coming quickly. **Blessed** is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.” (Revelation 22:7)*

***Blessed** are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. (Revelation 22:14)*

Do not take lightly the fact that the first and sixth beatitudes are nearly identical in their call to put what is written in Revelation into practice. Scripture always reinforces the most important things by stating them twice.

In other words, what I am asking is if biblical prophecy, and Revelation in particular, are merely intellectual puzzles that can be worked out academically, why is the greater emphasis placed on putting it into practice just like the rest of God’s Word? Why do we study it as if it is a specimen trapped in a terrarium for observation rather than treating it like the rest of Scripture which needs to be implemented and obeyed? Have you ever read Revelation with the idea of discovering what it might tell you to do or how to act as a Christian?

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

“**ALL** Scripture”. Not “some”, not “most”, but “**all**” of it teaches, reproves, corrects and trains us “for every good work”. Prophecy is not a special, exempt category set aside for informational purposes only. And Revelation, especially, was written to those who are equipped and trained by the rest of God’s Word to the degree that they naturally hold to it as a bond-servant carrying out the Master’s business. Revelation is not something best left to the academic “experts” but to the scripturally faithful.

“Revelation”, as its name plainly teaches, is an “unveiling”. But it is not merely an unveiling of the pieces of a puzzle, it is the unveiling of the completion of God’s plan. Scripture teaches that God’s main plan is salvation, the means by which man can be restored to a right relationship with God. What began and failed in the Garden in Genesis is finished and restored in Revelation, which is characterized by a series of peeks into what is taking place in heaven in parallel to the culmination of events on earth. As conditions on earth worsen, each return to the heavenly perspective reveals greater praise and joy until, finally, heaven and earth come together forever in Christ and the worldly is forever removed. The “unveiling” of the seals, trumpets and bowls is not the point of Revelation, but rather it is the completed work of salvation for Christ’s bond-servants. The greater teaching is not the wrath of God as expressed in those judgments, but the fulfillment of His promises for those exempt from them.

I think the way that someone handles Revelation might just be a kind of spiritual barometer betraying the condition and quality of their personal obedience to God’s Word in general. A heart faithful to the fundamental teachings of Christ and the Apostles reads Revelation and is drawn to what is taking place in the heavenly realm and latches on to the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promises for them in the coming kingdom of Christ; the struggling faith obsesses over the signs and judgments and whether time is running out. An intellectual faith becomes obsessed with the details and misses the greater message behind them. True bond-servants are no longer concerned for themselves but the Master’s business alone, and the Master’s business as revealed to His bond-servants in Revelation looks very inviting to them.

It is no coincidence that when we scratch the surface of those with the most bizarre interpretations of prophecy we most often find someone who holds contra-biblical beliefs to begin with in other foundational areas. Those who say we are already in the Tribulation or that Jesus will not return until we have won the whole world over to Christianity are most often replacementists—those believing God is through with Israel and therefore every time Scripture mentions Israel, it now refers to the Church, contrary to Romans 9-11 and other supporting Scriptures. They do not tend to believe Scripture literally and spiritualize away the text with regards to many things. The Jehovah’s Witnesses make a very big deal out of Revelation but their repeated public failures in predicting its fulfillment can be tied to, among other things, their belief that Jesus is *a* god but not *the* God. Those holding to unbiblical notions of the Holy Spirit and/or

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spiritual gifts are likewise often betrayed by the details of their interpretations. The fact is that without sound theology, there can be no resulting sound eschatology. The difficulty of understanding Revelation has far more to do with issues of personal faithfulness than achieving a system to “piece the puzzle” together and guess a date.

This may go a long way toward answering the question of why so many in a society whose culture, government and educational system were based on God’s Word largely rejected Christ at His First Coming. For Israel, having the information was not enough to overcome not actually putting it into practice. When the Magi recognized the sign of His coming they were provided the right answer of where it pointed to by the experts who could quote the correct Scripture as to where the Messiah was to be born, but those same experts neither saw the sign nor acted upon it themselves. Likewise we seem to be seeing the very same thing play out yet again today. Information alone never saved anyone who did not act upon it. A book or website on prophecy will ultimately be useless to a heart which refuses to daily crucify the world and live devoted to Christ alone.

The largest chapter of the Bible is devoted to explaining how God’s Word is organized: Psalm 119. If we do not rush through it and take the time to seriously study it, we find that there are eight Hebrew terms which are repeatedly used to describe the categories into which Scripture is organized. (All the repetition in Psalm 119 revolves around these terms so as to educate us.) Bible translators selected different English words to correlate to the different respective Hebrew words which describe these categories of God’s Word:

- “*Mitsvah*”, which is often translated as “**Commandments**”
- “*Torah*”, which is often translated as “**Law**”
- “*Mishpat*”, which is often translated as “**Ordinances**” or “**Judgments**”
- “*Piqqud*”, which is often translated as “**Precepts**”
- “*Choq*” or “*Chuqqah*”, which is often translated as “**Statutes**”
- “*Edah*” or “*Eduth*”, which is often translated as “**Testimonies**”
- “*Derek*” or “*Orach*”, which is often translated as “**Ways**”

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- “*Dabar*” or “*Imrah*”, which is often translated as “**Word**”

Every Scripture belongs to **at least** one of these categories. As we look at each of these categories of Scripture the consensus would probably be that these all have in common a requirement to not just know them, but to be obedient to the point of putting them into practice. Yet “prophecy” seems to be omitted from the list. In reality, it is not missing at all. If we want to understand what a biblical prophet is saying, we need to assign each verse provided through them to one or more of these categories. They are providing a judgment, precept, testimony, word, etc., all of which carry with it the tacit requirement of obedience. Prophecy is not singled out as a category exempt from the same requirements of the rest of God’s Word because it actually fits perfectly with the rest of Scripture. It does, however, carry with it the requirement that we are first to be obedient in general to the whole of God’s Word before attempting to dive into the deeper things.

In no way am I saying prophecy is unimportant or of secondary consideration. To the contrary, I am saying that it must be equally put into practice as with the rest of God’s Word which we do not assign to the category “prophecy”. Revelation in particular might be thought of as the spiritual carrot enticing a right practice of the rest of Scripture in our life, a reward to those faithful in the fundamentals. The puzzle is not waiting to be solved by a keen intellect but a faithful heart devoted exclusively to His Word and ways. Understanding, or the lack thereof, may have more to do with the quality of our faithfulness than anything else. What was sealed by Daniel and unsealed by John is the domain of those serving Christ the Master and no other.

In Him,

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