

A Future Journey with Christ

Genre

Revelation 1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9a, 20:6, 22:7, 22:14

INTRODUCTION:

We are continuing a voyage through the End Times of the Bible. This morning we are going to lay some more groundwork on how to study and interpret Revelation and by considering **Genre** (ZOHN' RUH). NOT (GEHN' REE) or (JENN' REE)!

Genre is a French word that means “kind” or “type”. We are laying foundational things. The general definition of “genre” is the type or style of writing for a particular piece of literature. While this may sound like something that we are unfamiliar with, genre is something that everyone interacts with and deciphers on a daily basis. It is second nature to us and we do not even realize that we are interpreting based upon genre.

The book of Revelation gives seven blessings to Christians that I would like to read this morning. I don't believe that the number seven is by accident.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Revelation 1:3 (NASB)

³ 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 14:13 (NASB)

¹³ 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 16:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ (“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 19:9a (NASB)

⁹ Then he *said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’”...

Revelation 20:6 (NASB)

⁶ 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 22:7 (NASB)

⁷ "And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."

Revelation 22:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ 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.

Prayer

These are the blessings that are promised to us if we read, understand, and heed or do what is written and remain faithful to the end. What is important, then, is that we are "rightly dividing the word of truth" and doing what Christ, through His word, is telling us to do.

2 Timothy 2:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a **workman** who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

We MUST be careful that we do not allow our preconceived ideas override what the scriptures are really trying to tell us. Jesus taught the disciples that the multitudes had preconceived ideas that were preventing them from seeing and hearing what He was teaching them. He told the disciples that, the multitude's unbelief was fulfilling prophecy written by Isaiah.

Matthew 13:13-16 (NASB)

¹³ Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,

You will keep on hearing, but will not understand;
You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;
¹⁵ For the heart of this people has become dull,
With their ears they scarcely hear,
And they have closed their eyes,
Otherwise they would see with their eyes,
Hear with their ears,
And understand with their heart and return,
And I would heal them.'

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.

Notice, once again, we are blessed when we understand what the scriptures are teaching us and we **DO** as they say. Sometimes reading scripture and applying them to our lives are very difficult. Especially, when it comes to the book of Revelation. We have already talked about the necessity of applying historical context and biblical context to what we read. Another extremely important element to use properly is this \$25 word called "GENRE".

BODY:

I. WHAT IS GENRE?

Let's say that you bought a CD of Old Time Gospel Favorites. You put it in your CD player and the first thing you hear is Judy Garland singing "Over the Rainbow".

What would your reaction be? You would think, "This may be a favorite, but it is not very old and it is definitely NOT Gospel!"

But how would we know that? Is there a master list of songs that would qualify as Old Time Gospel Favorites? Not really! What would be the things that would qualify the song to be on that list? Well, it would need to be a song where the lyrics are about what is taught in the Bible, the song should have been around for quite awhile, the song should be well known by people who sing and listen to Gospel hymns, and it should be popular. **That is genre!**

We know that a song qualifies to be on that CD if it meets the qualifications of that genre.

ILLUSTRATION:

For example, a person will not read the headline "Tigers Slay Indians" the same way in the international section of the newspaper as they would in the sports section or the community section.

If this title "**Tigers Slay Indians**" appeared in the international section of the newspaper, one would expect to read about some tigers in India that had become man hunters and were roaming around killing people in India.

But what if the title "**Tigers Slay Indians**" appeared in the MLB sports section?. You would expect to read about the Detroit Tigers annihilating the Cleveland Indians in a Major League baseball game. If it was in the local sports section, you would expect to read about some local high schools that had the mascots of Tigers and Indians and the Tigers easily beat the Indians. You would have to consider the time of year that this article was written to determine which sport the title may be referring to.

What if the "**Tigers Slay Indians**" occurred in the community section of the paper? Our minds would wander and possibly cause us to think that some tigers must escaped from the zoo and killed Indians on an Indian reservation. We might go into frenzy of concern about whether or not the tigers have been captured or are still on the loose, especially if the reader lives close to the reservation!

The way that we interpret the title and what we expect to read in the article is based upon the section of the newspaper, in which the headline appears. Each section of the newspaper is a genre.

Here is how genre functions: If we were in the sports section, we would not ask the question, "Who was killed?" Why? Because, although the word "slay" is war imagery, we do not equate it to mean that a four-legged striped tiger literally took a sword and plunged it into an American Indian and slew him. How do we know? Because of genre.

We use war imagery all of the time in sports. But it makes sense because it is the genre that it is in. Right? Consider football. Football is based off of war. We use phrases like, "He threw a bomb into the end zone"; "The teams were battling in the trenches"; "The defensive line "crushed" their offensive line". "The defensive guards had the quarter backs in their crosshairs all night and sacked them twelve times." This is war imagery that

makes sense in that genre. But if you take that language and put it into the international section, the phrases would mean something entirely different.

This is very important! Genres purpose is to dictate to us the questions that we are to ask. There are specific questions that go with specific genres.

So how does that affect the book of Revelation? Too many times we go to the book of Revelation and ask the question "When will the world end?" That question is actually nullified if you understand the genre that you are functioning in.

It is like taking the phrase "The defensive guards had the quarter backs in their crosshairs all night and sacked them twelve times" from the sports section and trying to apply it to the international scene.

You might ask, "Did some guards from England get bored and start looking for twenty-five cent pieces that were laying face down with the scope of their rifles and then pick the coins up and put them in a bag twelve different times?" That is pretty close to what the sentence said, isn't it?

"The defensive guards had the quarter backs in their crosshairs all night and sacked them twelve times."

The interpretation makes no sense! Because when we try to interpret words in the wrong genre, we will ask the wrong questions! And when we ask the wrong questions we end up with English guards with rifles putting quarters in a bag instead of quarter backs being tackled by defensive guards in a football game. If you come to a genre and ask the wrong questions, you will get answers, but those questions were never intended to be asked to begin with.

The questions you ask about football is entirely different than the questions you ask about international affairs. You laughed at the examples because you interacted with the genres, and because I crossed them, you found it humorous because it was so foolish. And yet when we come to the book of Revelation and ask questions that the genre would never allow, we don't laugh, we just buy into it "hook, line, and sinker". A phrase, by the way, that you intuitively understand because of genre.

How do you learn genres? You already know genre. Our minds are fascinating because they automatically go through all these processes of determining genres without us even understanding what the word "genre" really means. We don't know that we are doing it, we just intuitively get it!

If I wanted to know the NFL scores from last week, would it make sense to go to the TLC channel? No! Why? It is the wrong genre! Even the letters NFL and TLC tells you that going to the TLC channel to get NFL scores does not make sense. Why? Because you understand the genre of the Learning Channel and you know that National Football League scores from last week will not show up there. Asking the TLC channel to provide NFL scores is foolishness.

You already know genres. You interpret genres every time you walk into a restaurant, or a library, a sporting event, a casino, or even a church. You would not expect to walk into the sanctuary of a church on Sunday morning and find it full of slot machines and bright flashing lights. Genres are everywhere and you are constantly filtering through them.

The reason you know the right questions to ask is because you are familiar with the genres that are being presented.

The problem with Revelation, is that it is written in a genre that we are not familiar with. So, what happens when you are not familiar with the genres? You ask the wrong questions!

You cannot go into Barnes and Noble and find books that are written in Revelation's genre today because no one is writing in that genre today. Revelation has similar genres that we see in the rest of the Bible, in early first century apocrypha, and even in some situations today. But for the most part it is a unique breed. However, understanding Revelation would not have been a problem for the churches in Asia Minor. Because the genre of Revelation would be as familiar to them as the genre of a football game is to us today. They get it!

What are the genres of the book of Revelation? Notice I am using the plural for genre. If I say that there are multiple genres in Revelation, will that freak us out? No! We deal with multiple genres all of the time! Historical fiction is a mixed genre. We understand that it is revealing history, but it is fictitious at the same time. We get it!

So how do we learn how to interpret Revelation based upon the genre that was used by John around 95 AD? There are three genres in Revelation. Due to time constraints, we are only going to cover one of its genres today.

II. REVELATION IS AN EPISTOLARY GENRE.

It is a letter! How do we know? Because chapters 1-3 of John say that Revelation is a letter to the seven churches in Asia Minor. There are characteristics of this letter that you find in other letters in the Bible.

Revelation 1:4-5a (NASB)

⁴ John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,
⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

In today's genre, this verse would be like me saying "Dear Churches in Asia Minor". What would that mean? It is a greeting to the seven churches that this letter is to be circulated to. This would not make sense to the first century folks because they did not start their letters in that way.

First they say who it is that is writing. In this case "John". In our letters today, we have to look at the return address on the envelope or to go to the back of the letter to see who is writing the letter.

The second element is who it is being written to. "**To the seven churches that are in Asia**". If **John** is writing **to** the seven churches in Asia Minor, all of a sudden that genre will cause what is written to make a lot more sense.

Third, they write a salutation of some form. "**Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come...**" and so on.

As a matter of fact, out of the 22 New Testament epistles only two of them do not have all three elements up front. That is Hebrews and I John. Of the remaining 20, only three do not contain the words "grace and peace" in their salutation. So 17 of the 22 pretty much follow this exact formula to a tee. In fact if you look at...

Revelation 22:21 (NASB)

²¹ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

This is like us saying at the end of our letters today "Sincerely, Wayne". It is a BIG FLAG that he is waving around saying "I am writing this to a group of people." It is a letter coming from the Isle of Patmos to Ephesus and it is going to travel along the Roman road mail route through Asia Minor. Therefore, it being an epistolary genre, should not surprise us. How does this form the questions that we ask?

We should approach Revelation realizing that it is a letter addressing real situations that the seven churches were experiencing. The purpose of all of the epistles is to instruct. Every epistle or letter in the New Testament is situational. They are written to churches to address their specific situations.

In other words, Paul did not write his epistles thinking (**In boastful tones**) "I am going to write the doctrine that will shape the world! It will be canonized several years from now. These letters are going to be the manifesto of Christian doctrine." No, Paul, as John, wrote his epistles to address real situations, in real places, for a real group of people, and instruct them how to face their issues. So you would expect Revelation to follow that same epistolary genre.

CONCLUSION:

To recapitulate: When Revelation was written, the Christians were going through some serious persecution. All of the apostles were now dead except for John and the churches no longer had them to lean on. John was on the Isle of Patmos and he was probably going to die. Their faith was starting to wane. The Romans were trying to get them to worship their emperors. The Jews were considering them as a religious sect instead of a fulfillment of their prophecies. They were wondering why Jesus had not returned again as He had promised. They were beginning to wonder if their faith was really worth dying for. Had the apostles been wrong about Jesus?

This was the reason John wrote the letter to the churches. To answer their doubts, to address their problems, to instruct them on how to face their problems, and encourage them to remain faithful because it IS all worth it in the end. In the end Christ is going to return triumphant and all of the pain and sorrow that they and we had to endure during this short time on earth will be very insignificant when compared to the seven blessings that we were promised in our scripture reading this morning.

Revelation leaves the Christian with only have one option. Accept Christ's free gift of salvation and die to yourself. Do not be ashamed of the Gospel and share it with others. **Be faithful to death** even if that means captivity, banishment to an island, or even death itself!

He is Lord!