

A Future Journey with Christ

The Genres of Revelation

Revelation 1:1-3

INTRODUCTION:

We have been going through the groundwork of learning how to read and interpret Revelation. This will set us up for the time when we actually start going through the scriptures and try to determine exactly what John was trying to say when he wrote the book to the seven churches. The ultimate goal is not to try to use the book as a means of putting all of the end time events into chronological order as is the goal of many people today. Instead I want to understand what Jesus, through John, is trying to teach us **so we can be transformed by it!**

Last week we talked about genre. The official definition of genre according to the Collins English dictionary is "A particular type of literature, painting, music, film, or other art form which people consider as a class because it has special characteristics".

From this definition we can say that the **literary styles** (or genres) of Revelation will dictate how it should be interpreted. Our goal in Bible study is to read the words that are written in their original Biblical and historical context and interpret them in light of the genre by which they are written. Only then will we ask the right questions and be able to apply them correctly to our lives. We must allow the Bible to transform us instead of us trying to transform the Bible with our preconceived beliefs.

As we learned last week, if we read and interpret Revelation in the wrong genre, we will get answers but they will be answers to questions that were never intended to be asked in the first place.

We used the following illustration last week. Although this example does not meet the specific meaning of genre in that it is not literature, painting, music, film or other art form, it does illustrate how the interpretation will change depending on which literary style it is written. We equated a newspaper headline to a literary style.

ILLUSTRATION:

It is like taking a sentence that we read in the newspaper: "The defensive guards had the quarterbacks in their crosshairs all night and sacked them twelve times".

When we know that we are talking about a football game, we understand what happened. The defense guards of one football team were able to break through their opponent's offensive line and sacked their quarterbacks seven times during the game.

But if you try to interpret the sentence "The defensive guards had the quarterbacks in their crosshairs all night and sacked them twelve times" 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?"

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 looking for quarters lying upside down with their rifle scopes and putting the quarters in a bag **instead of** quarter backs being tackled by defensive guards in a football game.

We have to take these first steps first, because if we don't, there will be as many interpretations as there are people. We have to allow Revelation to say what John intended for it to say.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Revelation 1:1-3 (NASB)

1 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, ² who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, *even* to all that he saw. 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.

Prayer

BODY:

I. EPISTOLARY GENRE OF REVELATION.

Last week we learned that Revelation was an epistle, or a letter that was written to seven churches in Asia Minor. It was written by John while he was on the Isle of Patmos. He had been their pastor until he was exiled. He wrote Revelation, just as Paul wrote his epistles, to address real situations, in real places, for a real group of people, and instruct them how to face their problems. We must approach Revelation from that genre.

II. PROPHETIC GENRE OF REVELATION.

What is prophecy? The definition or meaning of this word in our society today is what? **PREDICTION!** Normally, the way people today define this word is that **prophecy equals prediction.** Many people have predicted the day that Jesus was coming again. Those predicted days have come and gone and Jesus has not come returned.

In the Old Testament, people who made prophesies that didn't come true, were to be stoned to death. This is not something that is to be taken lightly because the false prophesies directly reflect upon the One in which they are speaking for! If you are speaking for God, make sure it is God speaking!

Matthew 24:36 (NASB)

³⁶ “But of that day and hour no one knows, (what day or hour is He talking about? The second coming! The end of the world!) not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

And yet...Christians still try to determine the day and hour.

This next verse is a little more interesting.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6 (NASB)

⁵ Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. (Is it because they already know? NO! Because he continues in verse 2) ² For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. ³ While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; ⁵ for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; ⁶ so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.

Paul uses two distinct metaphors when he talks about the second coming of Christ here. The first one is "like a thief in the night". If you knew that a thief was coming to your house at 7:30 tonight, where would you be?

You would be at home so you could protect your house. But, how often does a thief schedule a break-in with you? It doesn't happen! The point is this...thieves are not predictable. They will come at a time that, they hope, is least expected. The exhortation is that you should remain prepared in case a thief comes.

Paul says that the second coming will be like a thief in the night. It will be unexpected. You just have to be prepared at all times. Here is how he says it. **We are not of night nor of darkness; 6 so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.** We should be living our lives with the thought "Perhaps today!".

Then Paul talks about "a woman in labor pains". When a woman starts having labor pains, there is one thing that you know. The baby is coming! It is inevitable. It is going to happen. Paul says the second coming is like the labor pains of a woman. There is no question about it. Jesus is coming back!

So when you put those two things together, what do you get. It is going to happen so you had better be ready. This prophecy reveals the unexpectedness of the second coming and the inevitability of the second coming. It is a prediction, but it is not strictly prediction. The emphasis is for us as Christians to constantly be prepared for His return. We must not be caught unfaithful.

How does the Bible your define the word "**prophecy**"? When you look at the over 200 verses in the New Testament that contain the words "prophet" or "prophecy" it will reveal that prophecy is a revelation about three things:

1. Who God is.
2. What God desires.
3. What God demands from His people.

So when you see a prophecy, these three elements are going to be in there somewhere. This is the main purpose for the prophecy.

Prophecy occurs whenever there is rebellion on the horizon or currently in place. Prophets are the mouthpiece of God to His people. Prophets are the ones who pull back the veil that separates us from the things that are occurring on the spiritual side and explains what is really happening in the world. We can only see the earthly side, prophecy explains what is really happening in the background from God's perspective.

It changes the questions that we ask. Suddenly I am not asking how the future will unfold. I am now asking what does this reveal about Who God is? What does this reveal about the way the world is really working? What does this reveal about the supernatural cosmic wars that are occurring behind the veil? What does this say about what the world is telling me to believe and what is really true? What is God saying to me about how to function in the present?

Remember our opening 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.

If you heed someone's advice or warning, you pay attention to it and **do** what they suggest. The prediction is that Jesus is coming again. We are to heed the prophecy. So the question is, What must I **do** in order to be prepared for His coming?

Every single time that a future event is revealed in scripture like Christ's second coming or a new heavens and a new earth, the question is always asked, "How then should we live?" So prophecy gives us an understanding what has happened in the past and an understanding what is assured to happen in the future. And in light of that, how we are to live in the present. The emphasis is always on how to live in the present. God is not throwing out a jigsaw puzzle and asking us to put the pieces together.

III. APOCALYPTIC GENRE OF REVELATION.

What is apocalyptic genre? Apocalyptic literature is a revelation of realities happening behind the veil, often communicated by other worldly beings with a great amount of symbolic language to comfort and exhort an oppressed people.

Apocalyptic literature is intended to talk about the reality that exists behind the spiritual veil. It is pulled back so you can see the way the world really is in the eyes of God.

Apocalyptic literature is often communicated by angels or elders in heaven as in Revelation. They are usually revealing it with a lot of symbolic language. Symbolism is **HUGH** in apocalyptic literature. We will go over that in more detail in a later message. Apocalyptic literature is given to comfort and exhort an oppressed people. It is a guide for oppressed people on how they should live.

This is important! Revelation is not the only apocalyptic literature that we have! It tends to be the only one we use to predict the future, the rapture, and the tribulation. But this isn't the only book that we have that would fall into the category of apocalyptic literature. Therefore maybe the rules that we use to read other apocalyptic literature should

influence the way we read Revelation. As a matter of fact, the very first apocalyptic literature that we have in existence is Daniel. At the time the book of Revelation was written 95-96 AD, we would also have had 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra (which is also 1 & 2 Esdras), and Assumption of Moses. There are other apocalyptic texts. As a matter of fact let me read one of them to you.

This is from 2 Esdras Chapter 11. It was also written around 100 AD which is approximately the same time as Revelation. I am going to read and I want to ask this question, "Does this sound familiar?"

Apocrypha: (Not in the canon) 2 Esdras Chapter 11

1 Then saw I a dream, and, behold, there came up from the sea an eagle, which had twelve feathered wings, and three heads.

2 And I saw, and, behold, she spread her wings over all the earth, and all the winds of the air blew on her, and were gathered together.

3 And I beheld, and out of her feathers there grew other contrary feathers; and they became little feathers and small.

4 But her heads were at rest: the head in the midst was greater than the other, yet rested it with the residue.

5 Moreover I beheld, and, lo, the eagle flew with her feathers, and reigned upon earth, and over them that dwelt therein.

6 And I saw that all things under heaven were subject unto her, and no man spake against her, no, not one creature upon earth.

This is full of symbolism. It sounds like Revelation 13 and Daniel 7. The beasts come out of the sea. What do those beasts represent? Kingdoms. So says the interpreter in Daniel 7. So this would also be representing a kingdom. The eagle was the key symbol, not of the United States, but Rome. America ripped it off from Rome. It was said that some of the legions of Rome were disbanded because they lost their eagle Roman standard. Their banner that they carried into battle had a big eagle on it and if they lost it they were punished by disbandment. The eagle was the primary sign of showing the dominance of the world. Here in 2 Esdras, an eagle is coming out of the sea. It talks about how it reigns and soars over all of creation. No one would speak a word against the eagle because if they did they would be punished.

When you read the book of Revelation it is going to be dealing with images that would have been very familiar to them. We should just recognize the fact that it is not familiar to us. Just because it is not familiar to us does not mean that we can do with it anything that we want.

So! How do we know that the book of Revelation is apocalyptic literature? Well, the word apocalyptic comes from the second word in Revelation (Apocalupsis).

Revelation 1:1 (NASB)

1 The **Revelation** (Apocalupsis) 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,

Also the book of Revelation emphasizes the fact that it is communicating through symbols.

Revelation 12:1-4 (NASB)

12 A great **sign** appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; ² and she was with child; and she **cried* out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.

³ Then another **sign** appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads *were* seven diadems. ⁴ And his tail **swept* away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.

Just in case you didn't catch the fact that you were reading symbols, often the meaning of the symbols will be interpreted for you.

In verse 9 Jesus interprets the symbol of the red dragon to John. He is pulling back the veil and letting us know what was really going on from God's perspective.

Revelation 12:9 (NASB)

⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

We use symbols all of the time. We might say "The sun is setting."

No it's not! The earth is rotating. Literally you look like a fool. If the sentence is using a symbol, let it be a symbol. That is the way all of language functions. We use so many symbols in our speech that we do not even realize that we are using them. That is the way language works. More on symbols in a later message.

CONCLUSION:

Although Revelation predicts things that will happen in the future, the message that we are to understand is what must we do to be prepared for those future events. The message of Revelation is that Satan is trying to conquer the entire world for himself. He is a very formidable foe. The question is raised, "How can you overcome Satan?" John tells us that Jesus is coming again and we are all going to face judgment. We are told that we will be judged based upon our deeds and faithfulness. We are assured that those who remain faithful until death will have their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life and in the end they WILL WIN!

So how did we overcome Satan?

Revelation 12:11 (NASB)

¹¹ And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

He is Lord!