

Christ in Prophecy

Pre-Trib 16: “Reading and Understanding Revelation”

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: Why is it important to read the book of Revelation? And what are the keys to understanding it? Stay tune for the opinions of 13 Bible prophecy experts.

Introduction

Dr. Reagan: Greetings in the name of Jesus our blessed hope and welcome to Christ in Prophecy. We have a very special treat in store for you because over the next few weeks we are going to share with you the opinions of 13 Bible prophecy experts concerning various questions related to the book of Revelation. I think you will find these interviews fascinating and very informative. The interviews were conducted at a national Bible prophecy conference that was held in the Dallas Texas area. In this program we are going to seek the answers to two questions about the book of Revelation. The first is related to the fact that most Christians have never even read the book of Revelation. So the question for our experts is this: Why is it important to read the book of Revelation?

Part 1

August Rosado: The book of Revelation is our blessed hope that's Titus 2:13 where Paul says, "We are to be looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and our Savior Jesus Christ." God did not give us the book of Revelation to intimidate us or scare us, but to show us that there is a blessed hope at the end of that book. And that's the coming of Jesus Christ back to this earth. There's a blessing for reading the book of Revelation that's Revelation 1:3, "Blessed is he who readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy and keep those things that are written therein for the time is at hand." So if John can say the time was at hand 2,000 years ago then how close can it be 2,000 years later? So Christians should not be intimidated when studying or reading the book of Revelation. It's our blessed hope.

Daymond Duck: David I want to give you four reasons right out of the Bible these are reasons that God gave. And I will read from the book of 2 Peter, 2 Peter 1:19-21, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." So four reasons right there; he says prophecy is sure, it's certain, it's reliable, it's accurate. He says you would do well to take heed, meaning you would be wise to pay attention to it. And this is what God is telling people, you would be wise to pay attention to it. He says that it is like a light, it helps people understand other passages of Scripture. It helps people understand current events. And he says it was given by the Holy Ghost. That's why it is so accurate; it was given by God or the Holy Spirit. I would like to add a five, six and seven and eight to this. And number five would be that all Scripture and that would include the book of Revelation; all Scripture is profitable. And then the sixth one would be that if God had not wanted us to know what was in

the book of Revelation all He had to do was to leave it out of the book of Revelation. But He put it in the book of Revelation and it's because He wants us to know what is there. And then another reason that I would tell people is that God promised to bless those who read, hear, and keep the Words of Scripture in the book of Revelation. So if a person doesn't know what's there they are going to miss a blessing. And then the final reason that I would give is that God gave the Scriptures to the Church, and it is the Church's responsibility to interpret the Scriptures and to teach others what is in the Scriptures. And those who are not doing that they are not meeting their responsibilities.

Don Perkins: I believe they should read it because it's the only book in the Bible that has a promise of blessing on it for those that read it. Another thing too that I think is that it's the only book in the Bible that literally gives us the close of world history. We can actually see what God has planned for man in the future in that book.

AI Gist: Well the most obvious answer is because it is part of God's Word and we are not to overlook any part of God's Word. Also the book of Revelation promises to the readers and the hearers and those who keep the things that are written in Revelation a special blessing from God. So there is a special blessing promised for those who read and study the Revelation. But most importantly is because I think the Revelation gives us some wonderful promises to look forward to. Sure the biggest point of it is related to the Tribulation which obviously has nothing to do with the Church per say. But beyond the Tribulation beginning in chapter 20 talking about the Millennial Kingdom. And beyond that the eternal ages of ages the new heaven and the new earth. What a glorious future that we have brother Dave. That God has promised us. And the idea is that even though there are hard times to come you know like a great novel it ends with and they live happily ever after. And we are going to live a happily ever after with our Lord Jesus. And so I mean there's a lot. And it's never been exhausted you can't exhaust it, the study

of the Revelation so there is a lot of great reasons to study it. A lot of people think it's too hard to understand but it's not. It was written for all of God's people.

Mark Hitchcock: Well people should read the book of Revelation for there are a lot of reasons why people should do that. But I think one of them is a very basic one is in Revelation 1:3 there is a blessing, there is a beatitude, there are seven beatitudes in the book of Revelation but the first one is, "Blessed are those, the one who reads this book, who hears what's in it and who applies it to their life, or who does it." And it's been called the Revelation as the blessing book. And so you know it's the only book in the Bible that has this kind of specific blessing stated there. So if we want God's blessing we hear that book, we read it, we understand it, we do what it says. Also too you know the Book of the Revelation is the book that tells us where this world is going. Franklin Roosevelt years ago in his first inaugural address said about the United States or this world we live in he said, "We don't know where we are going but we are well on our way." Now that is kind of the way people see the world today, you know, we don't where we going but we are well on our way. And the book of Revelation tells us where we are going, where this world is headed. God in the book of Genesis tells us how everything started, how everything began. The book of Revelation gives us the consummation of history. To me it's just a great comfort us to know where this world we live in is headed.

Jack Kinsella: Because God wrote it, they should read it because it's part of the Bible. You can't take part of a thought and expect to get the entire import from just half that thought. The Book of the Revelation deals with what amounts to the most important period in human history. This is the period where all of God's plans come together they come to fruition in one place. This is the place where the Lord judges a Christ rejecting world. And this is the place where the Lord keeps His promise for the national redemption of Israel. And the way that He does is such

a marvelous story, as well as giving us details about the things that we need to know before the Rapture because I believe the Rapture takes place before we go into the Tribulation period.

Ken Humphries: Well my feeling about it is those first three verses just will absolutely draw you to read it. And I think the very first verse reminds you that Jesus Christ is the very central person of prophecy, and therefore because of that in itself you would want to read it. And then the next couple of verses opens up to us for example that He gives a clear purpose of prophecy. He begins to open things up and tell us about the nearness of prophecy and about the sureness of prophecy. And then he comes to another point where he gives us a comforting promise of prophecy that wonderful promise if you read and heed this Word there's a blessing that will come to you. And eventually He gives us this certain performance of prophecy if I could put it like that. The time is at hand and that gives you an urgency, gives you a desire to say, "I need to know more about this. If Jesus is speaking then I need to be listening to what He is saying."

Ed Hindson: Reading the book of Revelation is like reading the end of any good book. You don't want to start in the front of the book and never get to the end of the story. Or as Paul Harvey used to often say, "Get to the rest of the story." And the rest of the story is the Jesus who died for our sins and rose from the dead is coming again. And the question is: Is He coming for you? And the answer is in the book of Revelation.

Gary Fisher: There could be many reasons. I leveled my response to two 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction, and righteousness." And that would include the book of Revelation. And then there is also the issue about Revelation 1:3 where it says, "read and heed." So Revelation is a book that instructs us in righteousness. It gives us an incentive to seek righteousness. And so without it there's not this urgency that Jesus is coming, and you've got to be ready to meet Him.

Terry James: Because we are commanded in the Bible to study, to show ourselves approved by God rightly dividing the Word of truth. So just since Revelation is part of the Bible we are of course commanded to read Revelation. Plus the book of Revelation itself is said to be a blessing to those who read it and keep the things that are written therein, and there is another reason for studying the book of Revelation. It's also given as a word of comfort. Prophecy in general and in Revelation particularly it is given as a word of comfort for the believer as just as in 1 Thessalonians 5:9 when it says that we are to be comforted by the knowledge that we are not appointed to wrath. Well the Revelation tells us that Jesus is coming again in power and glory. So those are some very good reasons might be to study Revelation.

Tom McCall: The book of Revelation is not something to be afraid of. In fact it's the one book that the Lord says you get a blessing from it. So why would people be afraid of getting a blessing from the Lord? And I think they feel that way because they think it's hard to understand or people have scared them away from it. I've had many people tell me I'm just too afraid to look at the book of Revelation. So it's a misunderstanding. I think it is a satanic blindness that has come over people. It's a book that spells the doom and the end of Satan so he certainly doesn't want people to read the book of Revelation.

Don McGee: Revelation is part of the Bible. And just being part of the Bible implies an inherent need to read it. And if you look at the first chapter and the very first verse you see that God gave Jesus the Revelation for us to show us somethings. And because of those things we need to be very much aware of what he said there.

Nathan Jones: Well for three very important reasons. For one Christ wins, good wins, so we win. We win I mean that's a wonderful thing to know. Two Satan loses, that way evil loses and

all the misery in the world is gone. And three it tells us what our eternal future is. We know through Revelation what our destiny is, and that Christ wins, evil loses and we spend forever with Jesus. So I can't think of a better book in the Bible to read than the book of Revelation.

Part 2

Dr. Reagan: I hope you are enjoying these interviews with such a variety of Bible prophecy experts. Our next question regarding the book of Revelation is a very important one it is: "What are the keys to understanding the book?" Here are some of the answers we received.

Mark Hitchcock: Well I think the keys to understanding the book of Revelation, there are couple of them. One is we have to understand that the book of Revelation has been described as the Grand Central Station of the Bible; it's where all the trains come in. So we really have to understand the Old Testament a lot of the imagery that is there. We have to understand that a lot of the symbols in the Book of the Revelation are taken from the Old Testament, a lot of these illusions. So as we understand these things we can understand the book of Revelation better. The other thing I think is very important is the book of Revelation is filled with symbols, but the symbols that are there are symbolic of something that's literal. And we know that from the very first chapter. Jesus kind of gives us the key to interpreting it. Where you remember Jesus is standing in the middle of seven lampstands and it says, "He holds seven stars in His right hand." Well Jesus goes on to say those seven lampstands are the seven churches, and the seven stars are the messengers of those seven churches. So Jesus I think there is giving us the key to how to interpret this book. He is saying when you see a symbol in this book that symbol stands for something that is literal. And so I think if you will follow that as we go through the book using you know the immediate context in Revelation. Some of the symbols it tells us right in the context what they are. Going back in the Old Testament we can understand what the book of Revelation means.

AI Gist: The thing that probably scares most people concerning the Revelation is all the symbolism that Jesus used in it. And they look at it and they get confused and they say, "Well I just don't understand." But the Bible is its own best interpreter of what it means in symbolism. We should always take Scripture literally wherever possible. But we accept that there is certainly a lot of symbolic talk in it; certainly in the book of Revelation. But where we find places where symbolic language is used the best thing to do is get your concordance out and find other places in the Bible where a similar phrase is used, and the Bible itself will tell you the meaning behind that. We live in a world full of symbols. I mean you drive down the street every sign that you see is a symbol, it communicates a certain message. When we read something the printed material is just a symbol. So we shouldn't be afraid of symbols. And the Bible behind every symbol is a literal meaning. And it's written in symbolic language because God intended for His people to understand it, but for it to be confusing to the world at large. People who do not possess the Spirit of God will never understand the Revelation. And so symbolism I guess is probably one of the biggest problems, but beyond that I think that people should just take time carefully like any Bible study carefully go through it. Understand step-by-step the pieces and eventually those pieces begin to come together and it makes a great deal of sense.

Don Perkins: One of the major keys I found is learning the table of contents in the book of Revelation. Revelation chapter 1 Jesus gives the table of contents. John was commanded to write the things that he had seen the things which are, and the things which shall be here after. That was literally the table of contents. Chapter 1 John sees the things that were written up to that time, or past tense. Chapters 2 and 3 deal with the things that are present or the present Church Age, and I would even say today we are still in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. Then chapters 4 through 22 deal with the things that shall be hereafter. To me that is one of the major keys into understanding the book of Revelation.

August Rosado: I would say Dave the key to understanding the book of Revelation is it's literal interpretation. We get into all kinds of doctrinal trouble when we approach the book of Revelation from an allegorically viewpoint, and we get into a big doctrinal mess. If the plain sense makes sense, as you say, don't look for any other sense or you're going to end up with a lot of nonsense. And there is a lot of nonsense out there today. So we need to approach the book of Revelation from a literal, historical, and grammatical interpretation. It fits like a hand in a glove so we should always approach it from a literally interpretation stand point.

Ed Hindson: I think first of all you have to understand the structure of the book. It's got seven basic simple points to it. It opens with a preface in chapter 1 Jesus commissions John on the Island of Patmos to write the book of Revelation. Secondly it moves to a proclamation, "the letters to the seven churches on the mainland of Asia Minor." Thirdly there's a problem that has to be resolved, John is caught up in the heaven in the heavenly vision he sees a seven sealed scroll. Wonders who's worthy to open the scroll. Only one person in the whole universe is worthy to do that, it's Christ the Lamb who appears; He's the answer to the problem. Then fourthly you have a process of judgment that follows in chapters 6-11 Jesus opens the seven seals of judgment. Then out of the seventh seal the seven trumpets of judgments sound and those are the great judgments of the Tribulation period that are then described in the book of Revelation. Fifthly right in the middle of the book you have a list of the seven symbolic players in the great end time's drama so that the symbols tell you who's who and who is doing what in the end times. Sixth you have the final plagues; the seven bowls of judgment in chapters 14-19 that cumulates in the fall of Babylon, the triumphal Return of Christ, and Jesus' victory at the Battle of Armageddon. And then the close of the book in chapters 20-22 the postscript you have the Millennial Kingdom and the New Heaven and the New Earth. There's the whole book of Revelation, it's not that hard.

Daymond Duck: Ok I would suggest that they begin by believing that God gave it, and that God wants to help them, and that God can help them, and that God will help them, and that they can understand it with God's help. Ok, and the next thing I would say they need to pray and get started studying it. So many never do it, they just blindly dismiss it. You know nobody understands it and that's the end of it, and the rest of their life they never go back and look at it and that kind of thing. And think that is a terrible shame because God has given it to them, and He wants them to study it and yet they don't do it. I think people need to pray for understanding, and then I think they need to open the book and they need to start looking. You know a lot of people don't ever do that. Today I would suggest to people that they get a verse-by-verse commentary of the book of Revelation. Probably more than one would be a good idea. And I think they ought to get a commentary that was written by someone that believes in the Pre-Trib Rapture and the Premillennial Second Coming of Jesus Christ. But those things will help. A lot of symbols are in the book of Revelation, I think people need to track down those symbols because they are usually explained someplace else in the book of Revelation or in another portion of the Scriptures. So use the marginal notes, use the footnotes, whatever they have, use the commentaries. Search the Scripture, let Scripture interpret Scripture. And the main thing is to get started and quit making excuses.

Nathan Jones: It's not a Chinese puzzle if you do five things. One you have to be saved or at least being led by the Holy Spirit, you need the Holy Spirit to help translate the Bible for you. Two you need to take it for it's literally plains sense meaning. Don't spiritualize it which is number three, don't make the Bible say what you want it to say, but let the Bible speak for itself. Four, context you have to take everything in context. You don't pull verses from chapters and books all over the Bible, read the context there. And Revelation is filled with symbols so the fifth thing let the symbols explain themselves. And I will give you an example Revelation 1:20, "The

mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." So let the symbols explain themselves. So if you do those five things you will understand Revelation.

Tom McCall: Well the main key I think is to understand that it's in the future. For so long, for so many centuries the book of Revelation was translated and understood to be happening at that time in history. And well if you try to compare the destruction of a third of the earth with this plague, and a third of the earth with that plague, and the rise of the Antichrist and so forth, and so on. Into what's happening today, why it would boggle the mind and is so confusing. So once they understood that this was a futurist thing, this is something that would happen after the church is gone in the Rapture for instance. And would happen in the future then they could see how these things could develop and how they could happen not in our time. Not in our circumstance but in a future circumstance that of course means the Tribulation and then the Millennium, and then the eternal state.

Don McGee: That the book of Revelation is the last book in the Bible is not an accident. The position of the book is just as much inspired as what's in it. And because it is the last book of the Bible it's implied that we need a basic working knowledge of everything that came before it. I believe that one of the keys is to have an understanding of the Book of Genesis. I believe that Genesis is paramount in importance to understanding Revelation. I also believe that there are particular passages in the Old Testament that need attention. For example Deuteronomy 28 speaks of the wandering Jew. 2 Samuel 7 speaks of the Davidic Covenant. Both those things play heavily into the events that happen as recorded by John in Revelation. Then of course there are the Minor Prophets, and the Major Prophets those things are key they are important you have to an understanding, or at least a working knowledge of those things in order to

understand what John is recording in the book of Revelation. Also in the New Testament there are some foundational principles that need to be understood. A person needs to understand the book of Matthew because it was written by a Jew to the Jews. And in the book of Matthew particularly Matthew 24 there is information that is very relevant to the information that you find in Revelation. And then the epistles that Paul wrote Paul talked about some things having to do with the Last Days and End Time events. And then once that's done, then a person needs to take the book and simply read it as you read anything, a novel, a newspaper whatever, several times maybe over a period of a couple of weeks. Once that's done then the student needs to sit down and study it. See there's a big difference between reading it and studying it. And study it taking notes, comparing what that person sees in Revelation with what has already been said in the previous 65 books. So when you take all those things you come to the idea that there is some preparation that's needed to understand what is there; absolutely impossible to understand it in my opinion without a basic understanding of those first books.

Gary Fisher: I was all over this when I first really started studying the Bible. And I ran into an individual called Dr. Henry Morris and he wrote a book about Revelation and he said as a claim about Revelation he said, and this is almost quote not word for word but he said, "Some people believe that Revelation is hard to understand. They are wrong Revelation is not hard to understand it's just hard to believe. Those who will believe it will understand it." So my admonition to anybody that asks the question read Revelation and believe it. Don't allegorize it. Don't spiritualize it. Just take it at face value and it will make sense.

Closing

Dr. Reagan: As we bring our program to a close let me quickly summarize the answers to the two questions that we posed to our experts. First, "Why is it important to read the book of Revelation?" The answer is that it assures us that the cosmic battle between God and Satan will

be won in behalf of believers when Jesus returns. Or to put it another way Jesus is returning and we win in the end.

The second question was: "What are the keys to understanding the book of Revelation?" Well one is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Another is a belief that God wants you to understand it. But the most important is to accept it for its plain sense meaning; just don't play games with it by spiritualizing its meaning.

I hope you will be back with us next week when we present our panel of experts with two more questions about the book of Revelation. The first will be: "What is the theme of the book?" The second will be: "What do they think about the very strange Preterist interpretation of Revelation that says all these prophecies were fulfilled in 70 AD when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem?"

Well that's our program for this week. I hope it's been blessing to you. Until next week the Lord willing this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb and Lion Ministries' saying, "Look up, be watchful, for your redemption is drawing near."

End of Program