

“REVELATION UNWRAPPED”

Exploring the Bible’s Most Mysterious Book

Session 1

Introduction

- The importance of knowing the *context* of something
 - ❖ Who said this? “I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are still truly good at heart”?
 - ❖ How does knowing the *context* of that statement affect your understanding of it?
 - ❖ An example from the Bible: Hebrews 6:4-6
- How various people approach the Book of Revelation
 - ❖ Some are FASCINATED with the book.
 - ❖ Some are FEARFUL of the book.
- How *should* we approach this book? (see 1:3 and 22:7) With FAITH
- A personal testimony
- B. B. Warfield, a famous Presbyterian of the 19th century, said this about Revelation:

“John’s Apocalypse need not be other than easy: all its symbols are either obvious natural ones, or else have their roots planted in the Old Testament and the figurative language of Jesus and his apostles. No one . . . need despair of reading this book with profit.”

Some Basic Principles of Interpretation

1. Come to the Scriptures with an OPEN MIND.
 (“Speak, for your servant is listening.” – 1 Samuel 3:10)

2. The Scriptures are sufficiently CLEAR in themselves for the average Christian to be able to understand their message.

(If you want to impress your friends, this is known as the principle of “the perspicuity of Scripture.”)

3. The Bible is CONSISTENT with itself. Therefore, it is its own best interpreter.

(Again, you will sound intelligent when you tell people that this is known as the principle of “the analogy of Scripture.”)

4. A book or passage of the Bible is best understood by seeking to determine the NATURAL MEANING intended by the author for his original audience.

This means that Biblical language ought to be taken in its simplest and most direct sense, unless there are compelling reasons not to. While there may be many applications, there is but one meaning to every Biblical passage. Searching for hidden, “secret” meanings is not the task of the interpreter. His task is to try his best to identify the single intended meaning of the author. To ascribe hidden meanings to Scripture requires that one assume an authority at least equal to Scripture. In prophetic passages (and Revelation is prophecy) there may indeed be a secondary, hidden, or less apparent meaning; but even here the inspired writers or Christ Himself are the only ones who can reliably tell us what that secondary or hidden meaning is.

5. It is important to identify the type of LITERATURE used by the Biblical writer and interpret it accordingly.

- What is the difference between *figurative* and *literal* language?
- Examples: The “Song of Songs”; Isaiah 5:20-30

6. The main purpose of prophecy is **ethical**. It is always meant to stimulate FAITH and REPENTANCE, not to tickle our curiosity!
- Examples:
 - ❖ **Micah:** “In that day, declares the Lord, I will destroy your horses from among you and demolish your chariots. I will destroy the cities of your land and tear down all your strongholds.... He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 5:10-11, 6:8).
 - ❖ **Isaiah:** “This is what the Lord says, Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, the man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil” (Isaiah 56:1-2).
7. It’s OK to say, “I DON’T KNOW!”

Let’s explore! – Revelation 1:1-3

- a) When you think of the word “revelation” (vs. 1), what ideas, images, or synonyms come to mind? Can you think of a time you had “a revelation”?
- b) List all the different persons or beings mentioned in these three verses:
- c) Why would God want to let someone know “what must soon take place”?
- d) God promises a “blessing” for those who read and heed this book (vs. 3). What blessings are you looking forward to as we begin this study?