

Things We Learned About the Book of Revelation

Since I believe our perspectives on biblical prophecy are so important, I want to share a summary of learnings gleaned from our recent **“Book of Faith” study of Revelation**. As I have often said, it is essential that we understand that scripture that speaks with a prophetic voice intends to tell the truth—NOT to tell the future. An easy way to remember this is: prophecy is about forth-telling, not foretelling. The Bible does not claim to tell the future; it claims to know that God’s reign will endure.

- Revelation is a word of encouragement to a number of real communities that John knew.
- These words were decipherable to their first audiences. John is not an esoteric writer but a pastoral theologian.
- Revelation is about the present at least as much as it is about the future. John imagines a future characterized by God’s deliverance and justice; that message intends to shape how those churches lived in the present.
- It is about faith and hope, not fear, confusion, or anxiety. The good news is that God’s reign knows no end.
- John seems to assume that others will read his visions. We are properly recipients of this good news as well.
- We need to counter the prevalent idea that this book (and others) are a complex cypher that only the enlightened can decode. It is intended to be understood by those to whom it was originally directed as inspiring hope for the future—NOT fear!
- Revelation does not provide an excuse to sit on our hands as we await the end (or, as is in the case for many poor interpreters these days, seek to hasten it!). Rather, it seeks to remind us about what is important, help us sharpen our vision, fill out our hopes, and express our deepest fears. All with the intention of helping us to live well in the present moment, not giving in to despair, but holding and beholding a vision of restoration, renewal, and the overcoming of the evil powers that hold sway in our time.

Blessings upon you as you engage this difficult book. It is exceedingly important that at least a few Christians grasp something of its true import.

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