

Decoding the Apocalypse With End-Times Prophecy

The book of Revelation—the apocalypse—is the final book of the Bible, a culmination of biblical prophecies. Its cryptic style and mysterious symbols have left many shaking their heads, dismissing the book as impossible to understand. But if that's the case, why would the Holy Spirit have ensured that St. John recorded it?

Several times in this book, we read, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (see Rev. 2:7a). God meant for us to read and understand the writings of the book of Revelation and promised a blessing for those who do (Rev. 1:3).

We are told in the first verse of Revelation that Jesus Himself sent this revelation by “His angel,” who signified these things. Signified means “made known by signs.” Many clues to properly decoding the apocalypse are found in chapter 1 of Revelation:

1. Much of the Revelation will be in cryptic signs (v. 1).
2. John is writing what he sees: “What you see, write in a book” (v. 11b). We must understand: John is seeing the present, the future, the spirit world, the natural world and various geographical locations. All of these include personalities and events that will occur in the future. We need the assistance of the Holy Spirit and other Scriptures to help us determine, for example, if John is writing about something he is seeing in the natural world or something of the spiritual realm.

“Study to show yourself approved by God, a workman who need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

As you read the apocalypse, ask: Is John seeing the spirit world or natural world in this passage? What is the event taking place here? Where could it happen? Where else in Scripture is this term used?

3. Remember, Scripture interprets Scripture. If a symbol is used in Revelation, it will be used somewhere else in Scripture to identify and determine the meaning. An easy example is found in chapter 1 of Revelation when John writes, "I saw seven golden candlesticks, and in the midst of the seven candlesticks was one like a Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and with a golden sash wrapped around the chest" (vv. 12b–13). Then in verse 16, he sees seven stars. He doesn't immediately identify what the stars or candlesticks signify, but in verse 20, Jesus explains the mystery: "The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven candlesticks which you saw are the seven churches." {eoa}

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